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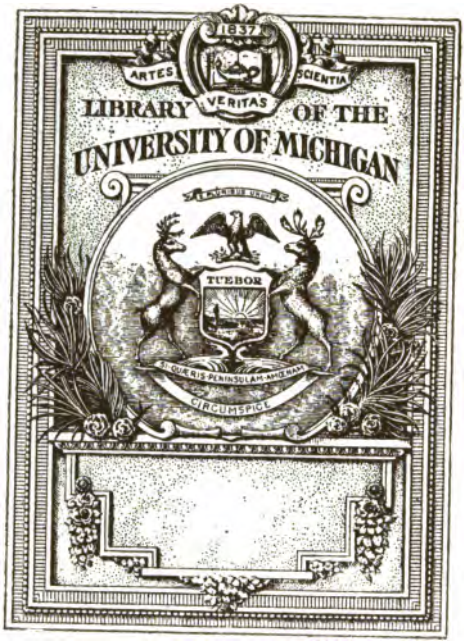
Mountain Paths

Maurice Maeterlinck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Mountain Paths

BY

MAURICE MAETERLINCK

Translated by

ALEXANDER TEIXEIRA DE MATTOS

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THE POWER OF THE DEAD

MOUNTAIN PATHS

I

THE POWER OF THE DEAD

I

IN that curious little masterpiece *A Beleagured City,* Mrs. Oliphant shows us the dead of a provincial town suddenly waxing indignant over the conduct and the morals of those inhabiting the town which they founded. They rise up in rebellion, invest the houses, the streets, the market-places and, by the pressure of their innumerable multitude, all-powerful though invisible, repulse the living, thrust them out of doors and, setting a strict watch, permit them to return to their roof-trees only after a treaty of peace and penitence has purified their hearts, atoned for their offences and ensured a more worthy future.

Undoubtedly a great truth underlies this fiction, which appears to us far-fetched because we perceive only material and ephemeral realities. The dead live and move in our midst far more really and effectually than the most venturesome imagination could depict. It is very doubtful whether they remain in their graves. It even seems increasingly certain that they never allowed themselves to be confined there. Under the tombstones where we believe them to lie imprisoned there are only a few ashes, which are no longer theirs, which they have abandoned without regret and which in all probability they no longer deign to remember. All that was themselves continues to have its being in our midst. How and under what aspect? After all these thousands, perhaps millions of years, we do not yet know; and no religion has been able to tell us with satisfying certainty, though all have striven to do so; but we may, by means of certain tokens, hope to learn.

2

Without further considering a mighty but obscure truth, which it is for the moment impossible to state precisely or to render palpable, let us concern ourselves with one which cannot be disputed. As I have said elsewhere, whatever our religious faith may be, there is at any rate one place where our dead cannot perish, where they continue to exist as really as when they were in the flesh and often more actively; and this living abiding-place, this consecrated spot, which for those whom we have lost becomes Heaven or Hell according as we draw nearer to or travel farther from their thoughts and their desires, is within ourselves.

And their thoughts and their desires are always higher than our own. It is, therefore, by uplifting ourselves that we approach them. It is we who must take the first steps, for they can no longer descend, whereas it is always possible for us to rise; for the dead, whatever they

may have been in life, become better than the best of us. The least worthy of them, in shedding the body, have shed its vices, its littlenesses, its weaknesses, which soon pass from our memory as well; and the spirit alone remains, which is pure in every man and able to desire only what is good. There are no wicked dead, because there are no wicked souls. This is why, as we purify ourselves, we restore life to those who were no more and transform our memory, which they inhabit, into Heaven.

3

And what was always true of all the dead is far more true to-day, when only the best are chosen for the tomb. In the region which we believe to be under the earth, which we call the Kingdom of the Shades and which in reality is the ethereal region and the Kingdom of Light, there are at this moment disturbances no less profound than those which we have expe-

rienced on the surface of the earth. The young dead have invaded it from every side; and since the beginning of this world they have never been so numerous, so full of energy and zeal. Whereas in the customary sequence of the years the dwelling-place of those who leave us receives only weary and exhausted lives, there is not one in this incomparable host who, to borrow Pericles' expression, "has not departed from life at the height of glory." Not one of them but has gone up, not down, to his death clad in the greatest sacrifice that man can make for an idea that cannot die. All that we have hitherto believed, all that we have striven to attain beyond ourselves, all that has lifted us to the level at which we stand, all that has overcome the evil days and the evil instincts of human nature: all this could have been no more than lies and illusions if such men as these, such a mass of merit and of glory, were really annihilated, had for ever disappeared, were

for ever useless and voiceless, for ever without influence in a world to which they have given life.

4

It is hardly possible that this could be so as regards the external survival of the dead; but it is absolutely certain that it is not so as regards their survival in ourselves. Here nothing is lost and no one perishes. Our memories are to-day peopled by a multitude of heroes struck down in the flower of their youth and very different from the pale and languid cohort of the past, composed almost wholly of the sick and the old, who had already ceased to exist before leaving the earth. We must tell ourselves that now, in every one of our homes, both in our cities and in the country-side, both in the palace and in the meanest hovel, there lives and reigns a young dead man in the glory of his strength. He fills the poorest, darkest dwelling with a splendour of which it had never ventured to dream. His constant

presence, imperious and inevitable, diffuses and maintains a religion and ideas which it had never known before, hallows everything around it, makes the eyes look higher, prevents the spirit from descending, purifies the air that is breathed and the speech that is held and the thoughts that are mustered there and, little by little, ennobles and uplifts the whole people on a scale of unexampled vastness.

5

Such dead as these have a power as profound, as fruitful as life and less precarious. It is terrible that this experience should have been made, for it is the most pitiless and the first in such enormous masses that mankind has undergone; but, now that the ordeal is over, we shall soon gather the most unexpected fruits. It will not be long before we see the differences widen and the destinies diverge between the nations which have acquired all these dead and all this glory and those which were deprived of them; and we shall

perceive with amazement that the nations which have lost the most are those which have kept their riches and their men. There are losses which are inestimable gains; and there are gains whereby the future is lost. There are dead whom the living cannot replace and the mere thought of whom accomplishes things which our bodies cannot perform. There are dead whose energy surpasses death and recovers life; and we are almost every one of us at this moment the mandataries of a being greater, nobler, graver, wiser and more truly living than ourselves. With all those who accompany him, he will be our judge, if it be true that the dead weigh the soul of the living and that our happiness depends on their verdict. He will be our guide and our protector, for it is the first time, since history has revealed its misfortunes to us, that man has felt so great a host of such mighty dead soaring above his head and speaking within his heart.

We shall live henceforward under their laws, which will be more just but not more

severe nor more cheerless than ours; for it is a mistake to suppose that the dead love nothing but gloom: they love only that justice and that truth which are the eternal forms of happiness.

From the depths of this justice and this truth in which they are all immersed, they will help us to destroy the great falsehoods of existence; for war and death, if they sow innumerable miseries and misfortunes, have at least the merit of destroying as many lives as they occasion evils. And all the sacrifices which they have made for us will have been in vain — and this is not possible — if they do not first of all bring about the fall of the lies on which we live and which it is not necessary to name, for each of us knows his own and is ashamed of them and will be eager to make an end of them.

They will teach us, before all else, from the depths of our hearts which are their living tombs, to love those who outlive them, since it is in them alone that they wholly exist.

MESSAGES FROM BEYOND THE GRAVE

II

MESSAGES FROM BEYOND THE GRAVE

I

SIR OLIVER LODGE is one of the most distinguished men of learning in our day. He is also one of the oldest, most active and most prominent members of that well-known Society for Psychical Research which, founded in 1882, has ever since striven to study with irreproachable scientific precision all the wonderful, inexplicable, occult and supernatural phenomena which have always baffled and still elude the comprehension of mankind. In addition to his purely scientific works, of which, not being qualified to judge, I do not speak, he is the author of some extremely remarkable books, such as *Man and the Universe, The Ether of Space* and *The Survival of Man,* in which the loftiest and most daring metaphysical speculations

are constantly controlled by the most prudent, wise and steadfast common sense.

Sir Oliver Lodge, therefore, is at the same time a philosopher and a practical, working scientist, accustomed to scientific methods which do not readily allow him to go astray; he has, in a word, one of the best-balanced brains that we could hope to meet; and he is convinced that the dead do not die and that they are able to communicate with us. He has tried to make us share his conviction in *The Survival of Man*. I am not sure that he has quite succeeded. True, he gives us a certain number of extraordinary facts, but they are facts which, in the last resort, can be explained by the unconscious intervention of intelligences other than those of the dead. He does not bring us the irrefutable proof, such as we should consider, for instance, the revelation of an incident, a detail, a piece of information so absolutely unknown to any living creature that it could come only from a spirit no longer of this world. We must admit, however,

that such a proof is, as he says, as difficult to conceive as to provide.

2

Sir Oliver's youngest son, Raymond, was born in 1889, became an engineer and enlisted for the duration of the war in September, 1914. He was sent out to Flanders early in the spring of 1915; and, on the 14th of September of the same year, before Ypres, while the company under his command was leaving the front-line trench, he was hit in the left side by a splinter of a shell; and he died a few hours later.

He was, as a photograph shows us, one of those admirable young British soldiers who are the perfect type of a robust, fresh, joyous humanity, clean and bright, and whose death seems the more cruel and the more incredible as it annihilates a greater aggregate of strength, hope and beauty.

His father has dedicated to his memory a volume entitled, *Raymond, or Life and Death;* and we are at first somewhat

bewildered at seeing that it is not, as one might expect, a book of lamentation, regrets and tears, but the accurate, deliberately impassive and at times almost cheerful report of a man of learning who thrusts aside his sorrow so that he may see clearly before him, wrestles with the thought of death and beholds the rising dawn of an immense and very strange hope.

3

I will not linger over the first part of the volume, which aims at making us acquainted with Raymond Lodge. It contains some forty letters written in the trenches, the testimony of his brother-officers' devotion to him, details of his death and so on. The letters, I may say in passing, are charmingly vivid and marked by a delicate and delightful humour whose only object is to reassure those who are not themselves in danger. I have not time to dwell upon them; and they are not what most interests us here.

But the second part, which Sir Oliver

Lodge calls *Supernormal Portion,* passes from the life that exists on the surface of our earth and introduces us into a very different world.

In the very first lines, the author reminds us that he has "made no secret of his conviction, not merely that personality persists, but that its continued existence is more entwined with the life of every day than has been generally imagined; that there is no real breach of continuity between the dead and the living; and that methods of intercommunion across what has seemed to be a gulf can be set going in response to the urgent demand of affection; that in fact, as Diotima told Socrates (*Symposium,* 202 and 203), 'Love bridges the Chasm.'"

Sir Oliver Lodge, then, is persuaded that his son, though dead, has not ceased to exist and that he has not gone far from those who love him. Raymond, in fact, seeks to communicate with his father as early as eleven days after his death. We know that these communications or so-

called communications from beyond the grave — let us not prejudge the issue for the moment — are made through the agency of a medium who is or believes himself to be inspired or possessed by the deceased or by a familiar spirit speaking in his name and repeating what the latter reveals to him. The medium conveys his information either orally or by automatic writing, or again, although this is very rare in the present instance, by table-turning. But I will pass over these preliminaries, which would carry us too far, and come straight to the communication which is, I think, the most astonishing of all and perhaps the only one that cannot be explained, or at least is exceedingly difficult to explain, by the intervention of the living.

About the end of August, 1915, that is to say, not many days before his death, Raymond, who, as we have seen, was near Ypres, had been photographed with the officers of his battalion by a travelling photographer. On the 27th of September

following, in the course of a sitting with the medium Peters, the spirit speaking by Peters' mouth said, suddenly:

"You have several portraits of this boy. Before he went away you had a good portrait of him — two, no, three. Two where he is alone and one where he is in a group of other men. He is particular that I should tell you of this. In one you see his walking-stick."

Now at that time the members of Sir Oliver Lodge's family did not know of the existence of this group. They attached no great importance, however, to the revelations but in subsequent sittings, notably on the 3rd of December, before the photographs had arrived, before they were seen, more detailed information was received. According to the spirit's statements, the photograph was of a dozen officers or more, taken out of doors, in front of a sort of shelter (the medium kept drawing vertical lines in the air). Some were sitting down and some were standing up at

the back. Raymond was sitting; somebody was leaning on him. There were several photographs taken.

On the 7th of December, the photographs arrived at Mariemont, Sir Oliver's house near Edgbaston. There were three copies, all differing slightly, of the same group of twenty-one officers, those in the back row standing up, the others seated. The group was taken outside a sort of temporary wooden structure, such as might be a hospital shed, with six conspicuous nearly vertical lines on the roof. Raymond was one of those sitting on the ground in front; his walking-stick, mentioned in the first revelation, was lying across his feet. And a striking piece of evidence is that his is the only instance where one man is leaning or resting his hand on the shoulder of another, in two of the photographs, or, in the third, his leg.

This manifestation is one of the most remarkable that have hitherto been obtained, because it eliminates almost entirely any telepathic interference, that is to say, any

subconscious intercommunication between the persons present at the sitting, all of whom were absolutely unaware of the existence of the photographs. If we refuse to admit the intervention of the deceased — which should, I agree, be admitted only in the last resort — we must, in order to explain the revelation, suppose that the subconsciousness of the medium or of one of those present entered into communication, through the vast mazes and deserts of space and amid millions of strange souls, with the subconsciousness of one of the officers or of one of the people who had seen these photographs whose existence there was no reason for suspecting. This is possible; but it is so fortuitous, so prodigious that the survival and intervention of the deceased would, in the circumstances, seem almost less supernatural and more probable.

4

I will not enter into the details of the numerous sittings which preceded or fol-

lowed this one; nor will I even undertake to summarize them. To share the emotion aroused, we must read the reports which faithfully reproduce these strange dialogues between the living and the dead. We receive the impression that the departed son comes daily closer and closer to life and converses more and more easily, more and more familiarly with all those who loved him before he was overtaken by the shadows of the grave. He recalls to each of them a thousand little forgotten incidents. He remains among his own kindred as though he had never left them. He is always present and prepared to answer. He mingles so completely in their whole life that no one any longer thinks of mourning his loss. They question him about his present state, ask him where he is, what he is, what he is doing. He needs no pressing; he at once declares himself astonished at the incredible reality of that new world. He is very happy there, reforming himself, condensing himself, so to speak, and gradually finding himself again.

The existence of the intelligence and of the will, disencumbered of the body, is freer, lighter, of greater range and diffusion, but continues very like what it was in the flesh. The environment is no longer physical but spiritual; and there is a translation to another plane rather than the break, the complete overthrow, the extraordinary transitions which we are pleased to imagine. After all, is it not fairly plausible? And are we not wrong in believing that death changes everything, from one day to the next, and that there is a sudden and inconceivable abyss between the hour which precedes decease and that which follows it? Is it in conformity with the habits of nature? Is the life-force which we carry within ourselves and which doubtless cannot be extinguished, is that force to so great a degree crippled and cramped by our body that, when it leaves this body, it becomes, then and there, entirely different and unrecognizable?

But I must set a limit to speculation and,

lest I exceed the limits of this essay, I must pass by two or three revelations less striking than that of the photograph, but pretty strange notwithstanding. Obviously, it is not the first time that such manifestations have occurred; but these are really of a higher quality than those which crowd several volumes of the *Proceedings*. Do they furnish the proof for which we ask? I do not think so; but will any one ever be able to supply us with that compelling proof? What can the discarnate spirit do when trying to establish that it continues to exist? If it speak to us of the most secret, the most private incidents of a common past, we reply that it is we who are reviving those memories within ourselves. If it aim at convincing us by its description of the world beyond the grave, not all the most glorious and unexpected pictures of that world which it might trace are worth anything as evidence, for they cannot be controlled. If we seek a proof by asking it to foretell the future, it confesses that

it does not know the future much better than we do, which is likely enough, seeing that any knowledge of this kind implies a sort of omniscience and consequently omnipotence which can hardly be acquired in a moment. All that remains to it, therefore, is such little snatches of evidence and uncertain attempts at proof as we find here. It is not enough, I admit; for psychometry, that is to say, a similar manifestation of clairvoyance between one living subconsciousness and another, gives almost equally astonishing results. But here as there these results show at least that we have around us wandering intelligences, already enfranchised from the narrow and burdensome laws of space and matter, that sometimes know things which we do not know or no longer know. Do they emanate from ourselves, are they only manifestations of faculties as yet unknown, or are they external, objective and independent of ourselves? Are they merely alive in the sense in which we speak of our bodies, or do they belong to bodies which

have ceased to exist? That is what we cannot yet decide; but it must be acknowledged that, once we admit their existence, which at this date is hardly contestable, it becomes much less difficult to agree that they belong to the dead.

This at least may be said: if experiments such as these do not demonstrate positively that the dead are able directly, manifestly and almost materially to mingle with our existence and to remain in touch with us, they prove that they continue to live in us much more ardently, profoundly, personally and passionately than had hitherto been believed; and that in itself is more than we dared hope.

BAD NEWS

III

BAD NEWS

I

FOR more than four years, evil tidings passed night and day over almost half the world of men. Never since our earth came into being were they known to spread in crowds so dense and busy and commanding. In the happy days of peace, we would come upon the gloomy visitants here and there, travelling over hill and dale, nearly always alone, sometimes in couples, rarely in companies of three, timid and shy, seeking to pass unnoticed and humbly undertaking the smallest messages of sorrow that destiny confided to their charge. Now they go with heads erect; they are almost arrogant; and swollen with their importance, they neglect any misfortunes that are not deathly. They encumber the roads, cross the seas

and rivers, invade the streets, do not forget the by-ways and climb the most rugged and stony tracks. There is not a hovel cowering in the dingiest and most obscure suburb of a great city, not a cottage hidden in the recesses of the poorest hamlet of the most inaccessible mountain, which escapes their search and towards which one of them, detached from the sinister band, does not hasten with its little footstep, eager, pitiless and sure. Each has its goal whence nothing can divert it. Through time and space, over rocks and walls they press onward, swift and determined, blind and deaf to all that would retard them, thinking only of fulfilling their duty, which is to announce as soon as may be to the most sensitive and defenceless heart the greatest sorrow that can fall upon it.

2

We watch them pass as emissaries of destiny. To us they seem as fatal as the very misfortune of which they are but the heralds; and no one dreams of barring

the way before them. So soon as one of them arrives, all unexpected, in our midst, we leave everything, we rush forward, we gather round it. Almost a religious fear compasses it about; we whisper reverently; and we should bow no lower in the presence of a messenger of God. Not only would no one dare to contradict it, or advise it, or beg it to be patient, to grant a few hours of respite, to hide in the darkness or to arrive by a longer road; on the contrary, all compete in offering it zealous if humble service. The most compassionate, the most pitiful are the most assiduous and obsequious, as though there were no duty more unmistakable, no act of charity more meritorious than to lead the dark envoy by the shortest and the quickest way to the heart which it is to strike.

3

Once again, we are here confounding that which belongs to destiny with that which belongs to ourselves. The misfortune was perhaps not to be avoided; but

a great part of the sorrows that attend it remain in our power. It is for us to be careful of them, to direct them, to subdue them, disarm them, delay them, turn them aside and sometimes even to stop them altogether.

In effect, we hardly yet know the psychology of sorrow, which is as deep, as complex and as worthy of study as the passions to which we devote so much of our time. In everyday life, it is true, great sorrows, though not so rare as we could have wished, were nevertheless too widely scattered for us to study them easily, step by step. To-day, alas, they are the ground of all our thoughts; and we are learning at last that, even as love or happiness or vanity, they have their secrets, their habits, their illusions, their sophistries, their dark corners, their baffling mazes and their unforeseen abysses; for man, whether he love or rejoice or weep, remains ever constant to himself!

It is not true, as we too willingly agree, that, since unhappiness must be known

sooner or later, our only duty is to reveal it at the earliest moment, for the sorrow that is yet green is very different from the sorrow that is already fading. It is not true, as we admit without question, that anything is better than ignorance or uncertainty and that there is a sort of cowardice in not forthwith announcing the bad news which we know to those whom it must prostrate in the dust. On the contrary, cowardice lies in ridding ourselves of the bad news as quickly as we may and in not bearing its whole burden, secretly and alone, as long as we are able. When the bad news arrives, our first duty is to set it apart, to prevent it from spreading, to master it as we would a malefactor or a stalking pestilence, to close all means of escape, to mount guard over it, so that it cannot break forth and do harm. Our duty is not merely, as the best of us and the most prudent seem to believe, to usher in the bad news with a thousand precautions, with short and muffled, sidelong and measured steps, by the back-door, into the

dwelling which it is to devastate; rather is it our duty definitely to forbid its entrance and to have the courage to chain it in our own dwelling, which it will fill with unjust and insupportable reproaches and upbraidings. Instead of making ourselves the easy echo of its cries, we should think only of stifling its voice. Each hour that we thus pass in restless and painful intimacy with the hateful prisoner is an hour of suffering which we accept for ourselves and which we spare the victim of fate. It is almost certain that the malignant recluse will end by escaping our vigilance; but here the very minutes have their value and there is no gain, however small, that we are entitled to neglect. The hour-glass that measures the phases of sorrow is much finer and truer than that which marks the stages of pleasure. The time that passes between the death of one whom we love and the moment when we hear of his death is as full of pain as it is of days. Most to be feared of all is the first blow of

misfortune; it is then that the heart is smitten and torn with a wound that will never heal. But this blow has not its shattering and sometimes mortal force unless it strike its victim at once and, so to speak, fresh from the event. Every hour that is interposed deadens the sting and lessens its virulence. A death already some weeks old no longer wears the same face as that which is made known on the very day when it occurs; and, if a few months have covered it, it is no longer a death, it has become a memory. The days that divide us from it have almost the same value whether they pass before we hear of it or afterwards. They remove beforehand from the eyes and heart the blinding horror of the loss; they step forward and draw it out of the clutch of madness into a past like that which softens regret. They weave a sort of retrospective memory which stretches into the past and grants straightway all that true memory would have given little by little, hour

by hour, during the long months that part the first despair from the sorrow which grows wise and reconciled and ready to hope anew.

THE SOUL OF NATIONS

IV

THE SOUL OF NATIONS

I

IN the admirable and touching pages in which Octave Mirbeau bequeaths his last thoughts to us, the great friend whose loss is mourned by all who in this world hunger and thirst after justice expresses his surprise at finding how in the supreme moments of its life the collective soul of the French nation differs from the soul of each of the individuals of which it is composed.

He had devoted the best part of his work to examining, dissecting, presenting in a blinding and sometimes unbearable light and stigmatizing with unequalled eloquence and bitterness the weaknesses and selfishness, the folly and meannesses, the vanity and sordid money-sense, the lack of conscience, honesty, charity, dignity, the

shameful stains on the life of his fellow-countrymen. And behold, in the hour of insistent duty, there arises suddenly, as in a fairy scene, out of the quagmire which he had so long stirred with rough and generous disgust, the purest, noblest, most patient, fraternal and whole-hearted spirit of heroism and sacrifice that the world has ever known, not only in the most glorious days of its history, but even in the time of its most romantic legends, which were but glorious dreams which it never hoped to realize.

I could say as much of another nation, which I know well, since it lives in the land where I was born. The Belgians, in the guise in which we saw them daily, appeared to give us no promise of a noble soul. They seemed to us narrow and limited, a little commonplace, honest in a mean, inglorious way, without ideals or generous aspirations, wholly absorbed by their petty material welfare, their petty local wrangles. Yet, when the same hour of duty sounded for them, more menacing and for-

midable than those of the other nations, because it preceded all of them in a terrible mystery; while there was everything to gain and nothing to lose, save honour, if they proved faithless to a plighted word; at the first call of their conscience aroused as by a thunderbolt, without hesitating or glancing at what they had to meet or undergo, with an unanimous and irresistible impulse, they astonished mankind by a decision such as no other people had ever taken and saved the world, well knowing that themselves could not be saved. And this assuredly is the noblest sacrifice that the heroes and martyrs who have hitherto appeared to be the professed exponents of sublime courage are able to achieve upon this earth of ours.

On the other hand, to those of us who had had occasion to mix with Germans, who had lived in Germany and believed that they knew German manners and letters, it seemed beyond doubt that the Bavarians, Saxons, Hanoverians and Rhinelanders, notwithstanding some defects of

education rather than character which grated upon us a little, also possessed certain qualities, notably a genial kindness, a gravity, a laboriousness, a steadiness, an uncomplaining temper, a simplicity in their domestic life, a sense of duty and a habit of taking life conscientiously, which we had never known or had succeeded in losing. So, despite the warnings of history, we were struck dumb with amazement and at first refused to believe the early tales of atrocities which were not incidental, as in every war, but deliberate, premeditated, systematic and perpetrated with a light heart by an entire people setting itself of sober purpose and with a sort of perverse pride outside the pale of humanity, transforming itself of a sudden into a pack of devils more formidable and destructive than all those which Hell had hitherto belched forth into our world.

2

We knew already and Dr. Gustave Le Bon had demonstrated to us in a curious

way that the soul of a crowd does not resemble the soul of any of its component members. According to the leaders and the circumstances that control it, the collective soul is sometimes loftier, juster, more generous and most often more impulsive, more credulous, more cruel, more barbarous and blind. But a crowd has only a provisional, momentary soul, which does not survive the short-lived and nearly always violent event that calls it into being; and its contingent and transitory psychology is hardly able to tell us how the profound, lasting and, so to speak, immortal soul of a nation takes shape.

3

It is quite natural that a nation should not know itself at all and that its acts should plunge it into a state of bewilderment from which it does not recover until history has explained them to a greater or lesser degree. None of the men who make up a nation knows himself; still less does any of them know his fellows. Not

one of us really knows who or what he is; not one of us can say what he will do in unexpected circumstances which are a trifle more serious than those which form the customary tissue of life. We spend our existence in questioning and exploring ourselves; our acts are as much a revelation to ourselves as to others; and, the nearer we draw to our end, the farther stretches the vista of that which still remains for us to discover. We own but the smallest part of ourselves; the rest, which is almost the whole, does not belong to us at all, but merges in the past and the future and in other mysteries more unknown than the future or the past.

What is true of each one of us is very much more true of a great nation composed of millions of men. That represents a future and a past stretching incomparably farther than those of a single human life. We admit and constantly repeat that a nation is guided by its dead. It is certain that the dead continue to live in it a far more active life than is generally

believed and that they control it unknown to itself, even as, at the other end of the ages, the men of the future, that is to say, all those who are not yet born, all those whom it carries within itself as it does its dead, play no less important a part in a nation's decisions. But in its very present, at the moment when it is living and putting forth its activity on this ea th, in addition to the power of those who no longer are and those who are not yet, there is outside the nation, outside the aggregate of bodies and brains that make it up, a host of forces and faculties which have not found or have not wished to take their place, or which do not abide in the nation consistently, and which nevertheless belong to it as essentially and direct it as effectively as those which are comprised within it. What our body contains when we believe ourselves circumscribed is little in comparison with what it does not contain; and it is in what the body does not contain that the highest and most powerful part of our being seems to dwell. We must not forget that it

grows stronger each day that we neither die nor come into being, in a word, that we are not wholly incarnate, and that, on the other hand, our flesh comprises much more than ourselves. It is this that constitutes all the floating forces which make up the real soul of a people, forces very much deeper and more numerous than those which seem fixed in the body and the spirit. They do not show themselves in the petty incidents of daily life, which concern only the mean and narrow covering in which a nation goes sheltered; but they unite, join forces and reveal their passionate ardour at the grave and tragic hours when everlasting destiny is at stake. They then lay down decisions which history inscribes on her records, decisions whose grandeur, generosity and heroism astonish even those who have taken them more or less unknown to themselves and often in spite of themselves, decisions which are manifested in their own eyes as an unexpected, magnificent and incomprehensible revelation of themselves.

THE MOTHERS

V

THE MOTHERS

I

IT was they who bore the main burden of suffering in this war.

In our streets and open spaces and all along the roads, in our churches, in our towns and villages, in every house, we come into contact with mothers who have lost their son or are living in an anguish more cruel than the certainty of death.

Let us try to understand their loss. They know what it means, but they do not tell the men.

Their son is taken from them at the fairest moment of his life, when their own is in its decline. When a child dies in infancy, it is as though his soul had hardly gone, as though it were lingering near the mother who brought it into the world, awaiting the time when it may return in a new form. The death which visits the

cradle is not the same as that which spreads terror over the earth; but a son who dies at the age of twenty does not come back again and leaves not a gleam of hope behind him. He carries away with him all the future that his mother had remaining to her, all that she gave to him and all his promise: the pangs, anguish and smiles of birth and childhood, the joys of youth, the reward and the harvest of maturity, the comfort and the peace of old age.

He carries away with him something much more than himself: it is not his life only that comes to an end, it is numberless days that finish suddenly, a whole generation that becomes extinct, a long series of faces, of little fondling hands, of play and laughter, all of which fall at one blow on the battle-field, bidding farewell to the sunshine and reentering the earth which they will not have known. All this the eyes of our mothers perceive without understanding; and this is why, at certain times, the weight and sadness of their glance are more than any of us can bear.

2

And yet they do not weep as the mothers wept in former wars. All their sons disappear one by one; and we do not hear them complain or moan as in days gone by, when great sufferings, great massacres and great catastrophes were surrounded by the clamours and lamentations of the mothers.

They do not gather in the public places, they do not utter recriminations, they rail at no one, they do not rebel. They swallow their sobs and stifle their tears, as though obeying a command which they have passed from one to the other, unknown to the men.

We do not know what it is that sustains them and gives them the strength to endure the remnant of their lives. Some of them have other children; and we can understand that they transfer to these the love and the future which death has shattered. Many of them have never lost or are striving to recover their faith in the eternal promises; and here again we can under-

stand that they do not despair, for the mothers of the martyrs did not despair either. But thousands of others, whose home is for ever deserted and whose sky is peopled by none but pale phantoms, retain the same hope as those who keep on hoping. What gives them this courage which astonishes whenever we behold it?

When the best, the most compassionate, the wisest among us meet one of these mothers who has just stealthily wiped her eyes, so that the sight of her unhappiness may not offend others who are happier, when we seek for words which, uttered amid the glaring directness of the most awful sorrow that can strike a human heart, shall not sound like odious or ridiculous lies, we can hardly find anything to say to her. We speak to her of the justice and the beauty of the cause for which her hero fell, of the immense and necessary sacrifice, of the remembrance and gratitude of mankind, of the irreality of life, which is measured not by the length of days but by the lofty height of duty and glory. We

add perhaps that the dead do not die, that there are no dead, that those who are no more live nearer to our souls than when they were in the flesh and that all that we loved in them lingers in our hearts so long as it is visited by our memory and revived by our love.

But, even while we speak, we feel the emptiness of what we say. We are conscious that all this is true only for those whom death has not hurled into the abyss where words are nothing more than childish babble; that the most ardent memory cannot take the place of a dear reality which we touch with our hands or lips; and that the most exalted thought is as nothing compared with the daily going out and coming in, the familiar presence at meals, the morning and evening kiss, the fond embrace at the departure and the intoxicating delight at the return. The mothers know and feel this better than we do; and that is why they do not answer our attempts at consolation and why they listen to them in silence, finding within

themselves other reasons for living and hoping than those which we, vainly searching the whole horizon of human certainty and thought, try to bring them from the outside. They resume the burden of their days without telling us whence they derive their strength or teaching us the secret of their self-sacrifice, their resignation and their heroism.

THREE UNKNOWN HEROES

VI

THREE UNKNOWN HEROES

I

THE Belgian government published last year a *Reply to the German White Book of 10 May 1915.*

This reply gives peremptory and categorical denials to all the allegations in the White Book on the subject of *francs-tireurs,* of attacks by civilians and of the Belgian women's cruelty to the German prisoners and wounded. It contains a body of authentic and overwhelming evidence upon the massacres at Andenne, Dinant, Louvain and Aerschot which enables history here and now to pronounce its verdict with even greater certainty than the most scrupulous jury of a criminal court.

Among the most frightful incidents reported in these accounts by eye-witnesses,

Mountain Paths

I would linger to-day upon only two of those which marked the sack of Aerschot; not that they are more odious or cruel than the others — on the contrary, beside the unprovoked murders and wholesale executions at Andenne, Dinant and Louvain, which are of unsurpassable horror, they seem almost kindly — but I select them for the very reason that they display more clearly than in its most violent excesses what we may call the normal mentality of the German army and the abominable things which it did when it believed itself to be acting with justice, moderation and humanity. I select them above all because they show us the admirable and touching state of mind, as displayed amidst a terrible ordeal, of a little Belgian city, the most innocent of all the victims of this war, and offer for our contemplation instances of simple and heroic self-sacrifice which have escaped notice and which it is well to bring to light, for they are as beautiful as the most splendid examples in the fairest pages of Plutarch.

Three Unknown Heroes

2

Aerschot is a humble and happy little town in Flemish Brabant, one of those modest unknown clusters of habitations which, like Dinant, for ever to be regretted and buried in the past, nobody used to visit, because they contained no buildings of note, but which retained and represented all the more, in the depths of their silence and their placid isolation, Flemish life in its most special, intimate, intense, traditional, suave and peaceable aspect. In these half-rustic little cities we find hardly any industries, at most a malt-kiln or two, a corn-mill, an oil-works, a chicory-factory. Their life is almost agricultural; and the well-to-do inhabitants live on the produce or the rents of their fields, their meadows and their woods. The houses in the church-square are substantial-looking, more or less cubical in shape and painted virgin white; their carriage-gates are adorned with glittering brasses. All through the week the square is almost de-

serted and wakens into life only on market-days and on Sunday mornings, at the hour of high mass. In a word, it is a picture of tranquillity, of placid waiting for meals and repose, of drowsy, easy existence and perhaps of happiness, if happiness consists in being happy in a half-slumber free of remote ambitions, exaggerated passions or over-eager dreams.

It was here, in this peaceful sojourn of immemorial restfulness, which not even the war had hitherto disturbed below the surface, that, on the 19th of August, 1914, at nine o'clock in the morning, after the retreat of the last Belgian soldiers, the square was suddenly invaded by a dense and endless stream of German troops. The burgomaster's son, a lad of fifteen, hurried to close the Venetian shutters of his father's house and was wounded in the leg by one of the bullets which the victors fired at random through the windows.

At ten o'clock, the German officer in command sent for the burgomaster, M. Tielemans, to appear at the Town-hall.

He was received with insults, hustled and abused for a *Schweinhund,* or pig-dog, a species of animal which appears to be indigenous to Germany.

Next, Colonel Stenger, commanding the 8th infantry brigade, and his two aides-de-camp took up their quarters in the burgomaster's house in the church-square and, I may add in passing, forthwith broke open all the drawers in their rooms, after which they went to the balcony and watched the march-past of their troops.

At four o'clock in the afternoon, obsessed by the delusion of *francs-tireurs,* some soldiers, seized with panic, began to fire shots in the streets. The colonel, standing on the balcony, was hit by a German bullet and fell. One of the aides-de-camp rushed downstairs shouting:

"The colonel is dead! I want the burgomaster!"

M. Tielemans felt that his time was come:

"This is a serious matter for me," he said to his wife.

She squeezed his hand and urged him to keep courage. The burgomaster was arrested and ill-treated by the soldiers. In vain his wife remarked to the captain that her husband and son could not have fired, since they possessed no weapons.

"That makes no difference," replied the bully in uniform; "he's responsible. Also," he added, "I want your son."

This son was the boy of fifteen who had been wounded in the leg. As he had a difficulty in walking, because of his wound, he was brutally jostled before his mother's eyes and escorted with kicks to the Town-hall, there to join his father.

Meanwhile this same captain, persisting in his contention that his men had been fired upon, compelled Madame Tielemans to go through the house with him, from cellar to attic. He was obliged to observe that all the rooms were empty and all the windows closed. Throughout this inspection, he threatened the poor woman with his revolver. Her daughter placed herself between her mother and their sinister visit-

or, who did not understand. When they returned to the hall downstairs, the mother asked him:

"What is to become of us?"

Coldly, he replied:

"You will be shot; so will your daughter and your servants."

The pillage and the methodical setting on fire of the town now began. All the houses on the right-hand side of the square were in flames. From time to time, the soldiers apostrophized the women, shouting:

"You're going to be shot, you're going to be shot!"

"At that moment," says Madame Tielemans, in her sworn deposition, "the soldiers were leaving our house, their arms filled with bottles of wine. They opened the windows and removed all the contents of our rooms. I turned away so as not to behold the pillage. By the lurid light of the burning houses, my eyes fell upon my husband, my son and my brother-in-law,

accompanied by some other gentlemen who were being led to execution. Never shall I forget the sight nor the look on the face of my husband seeking his house for the last time and asking himself what had befallen his wife and daughter, while I, lest I should sap his courage, could not call out, 'I am here!'"

The hours passed. The women were driven out of the town and led like a herd of cattle, along a road strewn with corpses, to a distant meadow, where they were penned until morning. The men were arrested and their hands tied behind their backs with copper wire so cruelly tightened as to draw blood. They were gathered into groups and made to lie down so that their heads touched the ground and they were unable to make any movement. The night was spent in this way, with the town burning and the pillage and orgy continuing.

Between five and six in the morning, the military authorities decided that the exe-

cutions should begin and that one of the largest groups of prisoners, composed of about a hundred civilians, should be present at the death of the burgomaster, his son and his brother. An officer informed the burgomaster that his hour had come. On hearing these words, a citizen of Aerschot, Claes van Nuffel by name, went up to the officer, begged him to spare the chief magistrate's life and offered to die in his stead. He added that he was the burgomaster's political adversary, but that he considered that, at this moment, M. Tielemans was essential to the town.

"No," replied the officer, harshly, "we must have the burgomaster."

M. Tielemans stood up, thanked M. van Nuffel and said that he would die with an easy mind, as he had spent his existence doing all the good in his power, and that he would not beg for mercy. He entreated, however, that the lives of his fellow-citizens and of his son, a boy of fifteen and his mother's last consolation, might be spared. The officer grinned and made no

reply. The burgomaster's brother next asked for mercy, not for himself but for his brother and his nephew. His request fell on deaf ears. The lad then got up and took his place between his father and his uncle. Six soldiers took aim at ten yards' distance; the officer lowered his sword; and, as the widow of the heroic burgomaster says, "the best man in this world had ceased to exist."

3

I will now quote from the evidence of M. Gustave Nys, an eye-witness of the horrible drama which nearly numbered him among its victims:

"The other civilians were thereupon placed in rows of three. The third in each row was to leave it and fall out behind the dead bodies, in order to be shot. All the civilians had their hands tied behind their backs. My brother and I stood next to each other: I was number two; my brother Omer, twenty years of age, was number

three. I asked the officer, 'May I change places with my brother? It makes no difference to you who falls under your bullets; but it does to my mother, who is a widow, for my brother has finished his studies and is more useful to her than I am.' Once again he refused to listen to my prayer. 'Fall out, number three!' My brother and I embraced; and he joined the others. There were thirty of them, drawn up in line. Then a horrible scene took place: the German soldiers, walking slowly along the row, killed three at each discharge of their rifles, waiting between the volleys for the officer's word of command."

4

Incidents such as these would pass unperceived if one did not take the trouble to seek them out and to collect them piously amid the huge mass of tragedies which for more than four years upset and ravaged the unhappy country tortured by its invaders. Had they occurred in the history of Greece or Rome, they would have found

a place among the great deeds that honour our earth and deserve to live for ever in the memory of man. It is our duty to make them known for a moment and to engrave in our recollection the names of those who were their heroes. Thus set down, simply and plainly, as befits historic truth, in depositions sworn under oath before a nameless registrar who has stripped them of any literary or sentimental embellishment, they give at first but a very faint idea of the intensity of the tragedy and the value of the sacrifice. There is here no question of a glorious death faced amid the excitement of the fighting, on a vast field of battle. Nor are we considering an indefinite or overhanging menace, or an uncertain, remote and perhaps avoidable danger. We have to do with an obscure, solitary, horrible and imminent death in a ditch; and the six rifle-barrels are there, aimed almost point-blank, ready, upon a sign of the officer who accepts your offer, to change you, in a second, into a heap of bleeding flesh and to send you to

the unknown, terrible region which man dreads all the more when he is still full of strength and life. There is not a moment's interval nor a gleam of hope between question and answer, between existence with all its joys and death with all its horrors. There is no encouragement, no word or gesture of stimulation or support, no reward; in an instant, all is given in exchange for nothing; it is sheer self-sacrifice standing naked and so pure that we are surprised that not even Germans were conquered by its beauty.

There was but one manner in which they could have extricated themselves without dishonour and that was to pardon the two victims; or else, supposing the thing which was not, which never is the case, that a death was absolutely necessary, there was a second solution, which was to accept the offer and to kill the martyr whom they ought to have worshipped on their knees. In this way they would only have acted as the worst of savages. But they discovered a third, which doubtless,

before them, the Carthaginians alone would have invented and adopted. For that matter, they exceeded the fiercest savagery and equalled the abominable Punic morality in another case which brings to mind that of Regulus and which will be the third instance of heroism that I intend to recall.

5

A few days after the events which I have narrated, on the 23rd of August, 1914, Dinant became the scene of wholesale massacres which involved exactly six hundred and six victims, including eleven children under five years old, twenty-eight of ages between ten and fifteen and seventy-one women.

Nothing can give an idea of the horror and infamy of these massacres, which form one of the most disgraceful and terrible pages in the long and monstrous history of Teuton shame. But it is not my purpose to speak of this for the moment. There would be too much to tell. I wish to-day

only to separate from the mass an episode in which the hero of Dinant-la-Wallone is worthy of a place beside his two brethren of Aerschot in Flanders.

Just outside Dinant, near the famous Roche à Bayard, the legendary glory of the fair and smiling little township, the Germans occupied the right bank of the Meuse and were beginning to build a bridge of boats. The French, hidden in the bushes and the windings of the left bank, were firing on the engineers. Their fire was not very well-sustained; and the Germans, without the least justification, drew the conclusion that it was due to *francs-tireurs*, who, for that matter, throughout this Belgian campaign, never existed except in their imagination. At that moment, eighty hostages, taken from among the inhabitants of Dinant, were collected and kept in sight at the foot of the rock. The German officer sent one of them, M. Bourdon, a clerk attached to the law-courts, to the left bank, to inform the enemy that, if the firing continued, all the

hostages would be instantly shot. M. Bourdon crossed the Meuse, fulfilled his mission and pluckily returned to reconstitute himself a prisoner. He assured the officer that he had convinced himself that there were no *francs-tireurs* and that only French soldiers of the regular army were taking part in the defence of the other bank. A few more bullets fell; and the officer caused the eighty hostages to be shot, beginning, that he might be punished as he deserved for his heroic faithfulness to his pledged word, with the poor clerk, his wife, his daughter and his two sons, one of whom was a mere child of fifteen.

WASTED BEAUTIES

VII

WASTED BEAUTIES

I

UNDER the grey skies and the disheartening rains of this autumnal July, I think of the light which I have left behind me. I have left it down there, on the now empty shores of the Mediterranean, and I ask myself in vain why I parted from it. Yet I was one of the last to tear myself away. All the others leave in the early days of April, recalled by legendary memories of the deceitful spring-tides of the north, nor do they realize that they are losing a great happiness.

It is good, it is wise to escape, amid the blue of sea and sky, the icy months of our winters, dismal as punishment; but, although in the south these months are warmer and above all more luminous than ours, they do not quite make up to us for the darkness and the frost of our native

climes. The brightest and warmest hours, in spite of all, retain an after-taste of cloud and snow; they are beautiful, but timid; swiftly and fearfully they hasten towards the night. Now man, who is born of the sun, like all things, has need of his hereditary portion of primitive heat and all-pervading light. He has within him numberless deep-seated cells which retain the memory of the resplendent days of the prime and become unhappy when they cannot reap their harvest of rays. Man can live in the gloom, but at long last he loses the smile and the confidence that are so essential. Because of our twilit summers it becomes indispensable to restore the balance between darkness and light and sometimes to drive away, by superb excesses of sunshine, the cold and the dark that invade our very souls.

2

It reigns at a few hours' distance from us, the incomparable steady sun which we no longer see. Those who leave before

mid-June do not know what happens when they are gone. Lo and behold, the real actors in this wonderful fairyland spring up on every side as though they had been awaiting the departure of intruding and mocking witnesses. During the winter, in the presence of the official visitors, they have played but a tempered prologue, a little colourless, a little slow, a little timid and restrained. But now of a sudden the great lyrical acts blaze forth upon the intoxicated earth.

The heavens open their vistas to the uttermost limits of the blue, to the supreme heights where the glory and rapture of God are outspread; and all the flowers rend the gardens, the rocks and the heaths, to uplift themselves and leap towards the gulf of gladness which draws them into space. The camomiles have gone mad; for six weeks they hold outstretched, to invisible lovers, their great round clusters like shields of glowing snow. The scarlet, tumultuous mantle of the Bougainvilleas blinds the houses whose

dazzled windows blink amid the flames. The yellow roses cover the hills with a saffron-coloured cloak; the pink roses, of the lovely, innocent pink of maiden blushes, flood the valleys, as though the divine well-springs of the dawn, which elaborate the ideal flesh of women and angels, had overflowed the earth. Others climb the trees, scale pillars, columns, house-fronts, porches, leap up and fall, rise again and multiply, jostle one another, lie one on top of the other, forming so many bunches of effervescing delight, so many silent swarms of impassioned petals. And the innumerable, diverse and imperious scents that flow through this ocean of mirth, like rivers which do not mingle, rivers whose source we recognize at every breath! Here is the cold, green torrent of the rose-geranium, the trickle of clove-carnations, the bright, limpid stream of lavender, the resinous eddy of the pine-barren and the wide, still, luscious lake, of an all but dizzy sweetness, of the orange-blossom, which drowns the country-side in

the vast, unmeasured fragrance of the azure heavens, recognized at last.

3

I do not believe that the world contains anything more beautiful than those gardens and valleys of the Provençal coast during the six or seven weeks when departing spring still mingles its verdure with the first warmth of advancing summer. But what gives this wonderful exultation of nature a melancholy which we do not find in any other spot is the inhuman and almost painful solitude in which it is revealed. Here, amid this desert, this silence, this emptiness, from the vine-arbours to the terraces and from the terraces to the porches of a thousand abandoned villas, reigns a rivalry of beauty which reaches a poignant agony of intensity, exhausting every energy, form and colour. There is here a sort of magic password, as though all the powers of grace and splendour that nature holds concealed had united to give at the same moment, to a spectator un-

known to men, one great, decisive proof of the blessings and the glories of the earth. There is here a sort of unparalleled expectation, awful and unendurable, which over the hedges, the gates and the walls watches for the coming of a mighty god; an ecstatic silence which demands a supernatural presence; a wild, exasperated impatience pouring from every side over the roads where nothing now passes save the mute and diaphanous procession of the hours.

4

Alas, how many beauties are wasted in this world! Here is enough to feed our eyes till death! Here is the wherewithal to gather memories which would support our souls even to the tomb! Here is that which would provide thousands of hearts with the supreme sustenance of life!

In the main, when we come to think of it, all that is best in us, all that is pure, happy and limpid in our intelligence and our feelings, has its origin in a few beautiful spectacles. If we had never seen beau-

tiful things, we should possess only poor and ugly images wherewith to clothe our ideas and emotions, which would perish of cold and wretchedness like those of the blind. The great highway which climbs from the plains of existence to the radiant heights of human consciousness would be so gloomy, so bare and so deserted that our thoughts would very soon lack the strength and courage to tread it; and where our thoughts no longer pass it is not long before the briars and the cruel horrors of the forest return. A beautiful spectacle which we might have seen, which was ours, which seemed to call us and from which we fled can never be replaced. Nothing more can grow in the spot where it awaited us. It leaves in our soul a great barren area, in which we shall find naught but thorns on the day when we most need roses. Our thoughts and our actions derive their energy and their shape from the things which our eyes have beheld. Between the heroic deed, the duty accomplished, the sacrifice generously accepted

and the beautiful landscape which we have seen in the past there is very often a closer and more vital connection than that which our memory has retained. The more we see of beautiful things the better fitted we become to perform good actions. If our inner life is to thrive, we need a magnificent store of wonderful spoils.

THE INSECT WORLD

VIII

THE INSECT WORLD

I

HENRI FABRE, as all the world now knows, is the author of half a score of well-filled volumes in which, under the title of *Souvenirs entomologiques*,[1] he set down the results of fifty years of observation, study and experiment on the insects that seem to us the best-known and the most familiar: different species of wasps and wild bees, a few gnats, flies, beetles and caterpillars; in a word, all those vague, unconscious, rudimentary and almost nameless little lives which surround us on every side and which we contemplate with eyes that are amused, but already thinking of other things, when we open our window to welcome the first hours of

[1] The English translation of Fabre's works, by Alexander Teixeira de Mattos, is issued in America by the publishers of the present volume.

spring, or when we go into the gardens or the fields to bask in the blue summer days.

2

We take up at random one of these great volumes and naturally expect to find first of all the very learned and rather dry lists of names, the very fastidious and exceedingly quaint specifications of those huge, dusty graveyards of which all the entomological treatises that we have read so far seem almost wholly to consist. We therefore open the book without zest and without unreasonable expectations; and forthwith, from between the open leaves, there rises and unfolds itself, without hesitation, without interruption and almost without remission to the end of the four thousand pages, the most extraordinary of tragic fairy plays that it is possible for the human imagination, not to create or to conceive, but to admit and to acclimatize within itself.

Indeed, there is no question here of the human imagination. The insect does not

belong to our world. The other animals, the plants even, notwithstanding their dumb life and the great secrets which they cherish, do not seem wholly foreign to us. In spite of all, we feel a certain earthly brotherhood in them. They often surprise and amaze our intelligence, but do not utterly upset it. There is something, on the other hand, about the insect that does not seem to belong to the habits, the ethics, the psychology of our globe. One would be inclined to say that the insect comes from another planet, more monstrous, more energetic, more insane, more atrocious, more infernal than our own. One would think that it was born of some comet that had lost its course and died demented in space. In vain does it seize upon life with an authority, a fecundity unequalled here below: we cannot accustom ourselves to the idea that it is a thought of that nature of whom we fondly believe ourselves to be the privileged children and probably the ideal to which all the earth's efforts tend. Only the infinitely small dis-

concerts us still more greatly; but what really is the infinitely small, other than an insect which our eyes do not see? There is, no doubt, in this astonishment and lack of understanding a certain instinctive and profound uneasiness inspired by those existences incomparably better-armed, better-equipped than our own, by those creatures made up of a sort of compressed energy and activity in which we suspect our most mysterious adversaries, our ultimate rivals and, perhaps, our successors.

3

But it is time, under the conduct of an admirable guide, to penetrate behind the scenes of our fairy play and to study at close quarters the actors and supernumeraries, loathsome or magnificent, as the case may be, grotesque or sinister, heroic or appalling, gifted or stupid and almost always improbable and unintelligible.

And here, to begin with, taking the first that comes, is one of those individuals, frequent in the South, where we can see it

prowling around the abundant manna which the mule scatters heedlessly along the white roads and the stony paths: I mean the Sacred Scarab of the Egyptians, or, more simply, the Dung-beetle, the brother of our northern Geotrupes, a big Coleopteron all clad in black, whose mission in this world is to shape the more savoury parts of his find into an enormous ball which he must next roll to the underground dining-room where the incredible digestive adventure is to take its course. But destiny, jealous of all undiluted bliss, before admitting him to that abode of sheer delight, imposes upon the grave and probably sententious beetle tribulations without number, which are nearly always complicated by the arrival of an untoward parasite.

Hardly has he begun, by dint of great efforts of his forehead and his bandy legs, to roll the toothsome sphere backwards, when an indelicate colleague, who has been awaiting the completion of the work, appears and hypocritically offers his serv-

ices. The other well knows that, in this case, help and services, besides being quite unnecessary, will soon mean partition and dispossession; and he accepts the enforced collaboration without enthusiasm. But, so that their respective rights may be clearly marked, the lawful owner invariably retains his original place, that is to say, he pushes the ball with his forehead, whereas the compulsory guest pulls it towards him on the other side. And thus it jogs along between the two gossips, amid interminable vicissitudes, flurried falls, ludicrous tumbles, till it reaches the place chosen to receive the treasure and to become the banqueting-hall. On arriving, the owner sets about digging out the refectory, while the sponger pretends to go innocently to sleep on the top of the bolus. The excavation becomes visibly wider and deeper; and soon the first Dung-beetle dives bodily into it. This is the moment for which the cunning auxiliary was waiting. He nimbly scrambles down from the blissful eminence and, pushing it with all the

energy that a bad conscience gives, strives to gain the offing. But the other, who is rather distrustful, interrupts his laborious digging, looks over the edge, sees the sacrilegious rape and leaps out of the hole. Caught in the act, the shameless and dishonest partner makes untold efforts to play upon the other's credulity, turns round and round the inestimable orb and, embracing it and propping himself against it, with mock heroic exertions, pretends to be frantically supporting it on a non-existent slope. The two expostulate with each other in silence, gesticulate wildly with their mandibles and tarsi and then, with one accord, bring back the ball to the burrow.

It is pronounced sufficiently spacious and comfortable. They introduce the treasure, they close the entrance to the corridor; and now in the propitious darkness and the warm damp, where the magnificent stercoral globe alone holds sway, the two reconciled messmates sit down face to face. Then, far from the light and the cares of

day and in the great silence of the subterranean shade, solemnly commences the most fabulous banquet whereof abdominal imagination ever evoked the absolute beatitudes.

For two whole months, they remain cloistered; and, with their paunches gradually hollowing out the inexhaustible sphere, definite archetypes and sovereign symbols of the pleasures of the table and the delights of the belly, they eat without stopping, without interrupting themselves for a second, day or night. And, while they gorge, steadily, with a movement perceptible and constant as that of a clock, at the rate of three millimetres a minute, an endless, unbroken ribbon unwinds and stretches itself behind them, fixing the memory and recording the hours, days and weeks of the prodigious feast.

4

After the Dung-beetle, that dolt of the company, let us greet, also in the order of the Coleoptera, the model household of

Minotaurus typhaeus, who is pretty well-known and extremely gentle, in spite of his dreadful name. The female digs a huge burrow which is often more than a yard and a half deep and which consists of spiral staircases, landings, passages and numerous chambers. The male loads the rubbish on the three-pronged fork that surmounts his head and carries it to the entrance of the conjugal dwelling. Next, he goes into the fields in quest of the harmless droppings left by the sheep, takes them down to the first story of the crypt and reduces them to flour with his trident, while the mother, right at the bottom, collects the flour and kneads it into huge cylindrical loaves, which will presently be food for the little ones. For three whole months, until the provisions are deemed sufficient, the unfortunate husband, without taking nourishment of any kind, exhausts himself in this gigantic work. At last, his task accomplished, feeling his end at hand, so as not to encumber the house with his wretched remains, he spends his

last strength in leaving the burrow, drags himself laboriously along and, lonely and resigned, knowing that he is henceforth good for nothing, goes and dies far away among the stones.

Here, on another side, are some rather strange caterpillars, the Processionaries, which are not rare; as it happens, a single string of them, five or six yards long, has just climbed down from my umbrella-pines and is at this moment unfolding itself in the walks of my garden, carpeting the ground traversed with transparent silk, according to the custom of the race. To say nothing of the meteorological apparatus of unparalleled delicacy which they carry on their backs, these caterpillars, as everybody knows, have this remarkable quality, that they travel only in a troop, one after the other, like Breughel's blind men or those of the parable, each of them obstinately, indissolubly following its leader; so much so that, our author having one morning disposed the file on the edge of a large stone vase, thus closing the

circuit, for seven whole days, during an atrocious week, amid cold, hunger and unspeakable weariness, the unhappy troop on its tragic round, without rest, respite or mercy, pursued the pitiless circle until death overtook it.

5

But I see that our heroes are infinitely too numerous and that we must not linger over our descriptions. We may at most, in enumerating the more important and familiar, bestow on each of them a hurried epithet, in the manner of old Homer. Shall I mention, for instance, the Leucospis, a parasite of the Mason-bee, who, to slay his brothers and sisters in their cradle, arms himself with a horn helmet and a barbed breastplate, which he doffs immediately after the extermination, the safeguard of a hideous right of primogeniture? Shall I tell of the marvellous anatomical knowledge of the Tachytes, of the Cerceris, of the Ammophila, of the Languedocian Sphex and many other

wasps, who, according as they wish to paralyse or to kill their prey or their adversary, know exactly, without ever blundering, which nerve-centres to strike with their sting or their mandibles? Shall I speak of the art of the Eumenes, who transforms her stronghold into a complete museum adorned with shells and with grains of translucent quartz; of the magnificent metamorphosis of the Grey Locust; of the musical instrument owned by the Cricket, whose bow numbers one hundred and fifty triangular prisms that set in motion simultaneously the four dulcimers of the wing-case? Shall I sing the fairy-like birth of the nymph of the Onthophagus, a transparent monster, with a bull's snout, that seems carved out of a block of crystal? Would you behold the Flesh-fly, the common Blue-bottle, daughter of the maggot, as she issues from the earth? Listen to our author:

"She disjoints her head into two movable halves, which, each distended with its

great red eye, by turns separate and reunite. In the intervening space, a large, glassy hernia rises and disappears, disappears and rises. When the two halves move asunder, with one eye forced back to the right and the other to the left, it is as though the insect were splitting its brain-pan in order to expel the contents. Then the hernia rises, blunt at the end and swollen into a great knob. Next, the forehead closes and the hernia retreats, leaving visible only a kind of shapeless muzzle. In short, a frontal pouch, with deep pulsations, momentarily renewed, becomes the instrument of deliverance, the pestle wherewith the newly-hatched Dipteron bruises the sand and causes it to crumble. Gradually, the legs push the rubbish back and the insect advances so much towards the surface."

6

And monster after monster passes, such as the imagination of Bosch or Callot never conceived! The larva of the Rose-

chafer, which, though it has legs under its belly, always travels on its back; the Blue-winged Locust, unluckier still than the Flesh-fly and possessing nothing wherewith to perforate the soil, to escape from the tomb and reach the light but a cervical bladder, a viscous blister; and the Empusa, who, with her curved abdomen, her great projecting eyes, her legs with knee-pieces armed with cleavers, her halberd, her abnormally tall mitre, would certainly be the most devilish goblin that ever walked the earth, if, beside her, the Praying Mantis were not so frightful that her mere aspect deprives her victims of their power of movement when she assumes, in front of them, what the entomologists have termed "the spectral attitude."

7

One cannot mention, even casually, the numberless industries, nearly all of absorbing interest, exercised among the rocks, under the ground, in the walls, on

the branches, the grass, the flowers, the fruits and down to the very bodies of the subjects studied; for we sometimes find a treble superposition of parasites, as in the Oil-beetles; and we see the maggot itself, the sinister guest at the last feast of all, feed some thirty brigands with its substance.

Among the Hymenoptera, which represent the most intellectual class in the world which we are studying, the building-talents of our wonderful Hive-bee are certainly equalled, in other orders of architecture, by those of more than one wild and solitary bee and notably by the Megachile, or Leaf-cutter, a little insect which is nothing to look at and which, to house its eggs, manufactures honey-pots formed of a multitude of disks and ellipses cut with mathematical precision from the leaves of certain trees. For lack of space, I am unable, to my great regret, to quote the beautiful and pellucid pages which Fabre, with his usual conscientiousness, devotes to the exhaustive study of this admirable

work; nevertheless, since the occasion offers, let us listen to his own words, though it be but for a moment and in regard to a single detail:

"With the oval pieces, it becomes another matter. What model has the Megachile when cutting her neat ellipses out of the delicate material for her wallets, the robinia-leaves? What ideal pattern guides her scissors? What system of measurement tells her the dimension? One would like to picture the insect as a living pair of compasses, capable of tracing an elliptic curve by a certain natural inflexion of its body, even as our arm traces a circle by swinging from the shoulder. A blind mechanism, the mere outcome of its organization, would alone be responsible for its geometry. This explanation would tempt me if the large oval pieces were not accompanied by much smaller ones, also oval, which are used to fill the empty spaces. A pair of compasses which changes its radius of its own accord and

alters the curve according to the plan before it appears to me an instrument somewhat difficult to believe in. There must be something better than that. The circular pieces of the lid suggest it to us.

"If, by the mere flexion inherent in her structure, the Leaf-cutter succeeds in cutting out ovals, how does she manage to cut out rounds? Can we admit the presence of other wheels in the machinery for the new pattern, so different in shape and size? However, the real point of the difficulty does not lie there. Those rounds, for the most part, fit the mouth of the jar with almost exact precision. When the cell is finished, the bee flies hundreds of yards away to make the lid. She arrives at the leaf from which the disk is to be cut. What picture, what recollection has she of the pot to be covered? Why, none at all: she has never seen it; she does her work underground, in utter darkness! At the utmost, she can have the indications of touch: not actual indications, of course, for the pot is not there,

but past indications, useless in a work of precision. And yet the disk to be cut out must have a fixed diameter: if it were too large, it would not go in; if too small, it would close badly, it would slip down on the honey and suffocate the egg. How shall it be given its correct dimensions without a pattern? The bee does not hesitate for a moment. She cuts out her disk with the same celerity which she would display in detaching any shapeless lobe that might do for a stopper; and that disk, without further measurement, is of the right size to fit the pot. Let whoso will explain this geometry, which in my opinion is inexplicable, even when we allow for memory begotten of touch and sight."

Let us add that the author calculated that, to form the cells of a kindred Megachile, the Silky Megachile, exactly 1,064 of these ellipses and disks would be required; and they must all be collected

and shaped in the course of an existence that lasts a few weeks.

8

Who would imagine that the Pentatoma, on the other hand, the poor and evil-smelling Wood-bug, has invented a really extraordinary apparatus wherewith to leave the egg? And first let us state that this egg is a marvellous little box of snowy whiteness, which our author thus describes:

"The microscope discovers a surface engraved with dents similar to those of a thimble and arranged with exquisite symmetry. At the top and bottom of the cylinder is a wide belt of a dead black; on the sides, a large white zone with four big, black spots evenly distributed. The lid, surrounded by snowy cilia and encircled with white at the edge, swells into a black cap with a white knot in the centre. Altogether, a striking burial urn, with the sud-

den contrast between the coal-black and the fleecy white. The Etruscans would have found a magnificent model here for their funeral pottery."

The little bug, whose forehead is too soft, covers her head, to raise the lid of the box, with a mitre formed of three triangular rods, which is always at the bottom of the egg at the moment of delivery. Her limbs being sheathed like those of a mummy, she has nothing wherewith to put her rods in motion except the pulsations produced by the rhythmic flow of blood in her skull and acting after the manner of a piston. The rivets of the lid gradually give way; and, as soon as the insect is free, it lays aside its mechanical helmet.

Another species of bug, *Reduvius personatus*, who lives mostly in lumber-rooms, where she lies hidden in the dust, has invented a still more astonishing system of hatching. Here, the lid of the egg is not riveted, as in the case of the Pentatomae, but simply glued. At the moment of liberation, the lid rises and we see:

". . . a spherical vesicle emerge from the shell and gradually expand, like a soap-bubble blown through a straw. Driven farther and farther back by the extension of this bladder, the lid falls.

" Then the bomb bursts; in other words, the blister, swollen beyond its capacity of resistance, rips at the top. This envelope, which is an extremely tenuous membrane, generally remains clinging to the edge of the orifice, where it forms a high, white rim. At other times, the explosion loosens it and flings it outside the shell. In those conditions, it is a dainty cup, half spherical, with torn edges, lengthened out below into a delicate, winding stalk."

Now, how is this miraculous explosion produced? Fabre assumes that:

" Very slowly, as the tiny creature takes shape and grows, this bladder-shaped reservoir receives the products of the work of respiration performed under the cover of the outer membrane. Instead of being expelled through the egg-shell, the carbonic

acid, the incessant result of the vital oxidization, is accumulated in this sort of gasometer, inflates and distends it and presses upon the lid. When the insect is ripe for hatching, a superadded activity in the respiration completes the inflation, which perhaps has been preparing since the first evolution of the germ. At last, yielding to the increasing pressure of the gaseous bladder, the lid becomes unsealed. The chick in its shell has its air-chamber; the young Reduvius has its bomb of carbonic acid: it frees itself in the act of breathing."

9

One would never weary of dipping eagerly into these inexhaustible treasures. We imagine, for instance, that, from seeing cobwebs so frequently displayed in all manner of places, we possess adequate notions of the genius and methods of our familiar spiders. Far from it: the realities of scientific observation call for an entire volume crammed with revelations of which we had

no conception. I will simply name, at random, the symmetrical arches of the Clotho Spider's nest, the astonishing funicular flight of the young of our Garden Spider, the diving-bell of the Water Spider, the live telephone-wire which connects the web with the leg of the Cross Spider hidden in her parlour and informs her whether the vibration of her toils is due to the capture of a prey or a caprice of the wind.

It is impossible, therefore, short of having unlimited space at one's disposal, to do more than touch, as it were with the tip of the phrases, upon the miracles of maternal instinct, which, moreover, are confounded with those of the higher manufactures and form the bright centre of the insect's psychology. One would, in the same way, require several chapters to convey a summary idea of the nuptial rites which constitute the quaintest and most fabulous episodes of these new Arabian Nights.

The male of the Spanish Fly, for in-

stance, begins by frenziedly beating his spouse with his abdomen and his feet, after which, with his arms crossed and quivering, he remains long in ecstasy. The newly-wedded Osmiae clap their mandibles terribly, as though it were a matter rather of devouring each other; on the other hand, the largest of our moths, the Great Peacock, who is the size of a bat, when drunk with love finds his mouth so completely atrophied that it becomes no more than a vague shadow. But nothing equals the marriage of the Green Grasshopper, of which I cannot speak here, for it is doubtful whether even Latin possesses the words needed to describe it seemingly.

All said, the marriage-customs are dreadful and, contrary to that which happens in every other world, here it is the female of the pair that stands for strength and intelligence and also for the cruelty and tyranny which appear to be their inevitable outcome. Almost every wedding ends in the violent and immediate death of the husband. Often, the bride begins by

eating a certain number of suitors. The prototype of these fantastic unions could be supplied by the Languedocian Scorpions, who, as we know, carry lobster-claws and a long tail supplied with a sting, the prick of which is extremely dangerous. They have a prelude to the festival in the shape of a sentimental stroll, claw in claw; then, motionless, with fingers still gripped, they contemplate each other blissfully, interminably; day and night pass over their ecstasy, while they remain face to face, petrified with admiration. Next, the foreheads come together and touch; the mouths — if we can give the name of mouth to the monstrous orifice that opens between the claws — are joined in a sort of kiss; after which the union is accomplished, the male is transfixed with a mortal sting and the terrible spouse crunches and gobbles him up with gusto.

But the Mantis, the ecstatic insect with the arms always raised in an attitude of supreme invocation, the horrible *Mantis religiosa* or Praying Mantis, does better

still: she eats her husbands (for the insatiable creature sometimes consumes seven or eight in succession) while they strain her passionately to their heart. Her inconceivable kisses devour, not in a metaphorical, but in an appallingly real fashion, the ill-fated choice of her soul stomach. She begins with the head, goes down to the thorax, nor stops till she comes to the hind-legs, which she deems too tough. She then pushes away the unfortunate remains, while a new lover, who was quietly awaiting the end of the monstrous banquet, heroically steps forward to undergo the same fate.

10

Henri Fabre is indeed the revealer of this new world, for, strange as the admission may seem at a time when we think that we know all that surrounds us, most of those insects minutely described in the vocabularies, learnedly classified and barbarously christened, had hardly ever been observed in real life or thoroughly inves-

tigated in all the phases of their brief and evasive appearances. He has devoted to surprising their little secrets, which are the reverse of our greatest mysteries, fifty years of a solitary existence, misunderstood, poor, often very near to penury, but lit up every day by the joy which a truth brings, which is the greatest of all human joys. Petty truths, I shall be told, those presented by the habits of a spider or a grasshopper. There are no petty truths to-day; there is but one truth, whose looking-glass, to our uncertain eyes, seems broken, though its every fragment, whether reflecting the evolution of a planet or the flight of a bee, contains the supreme law.

And these truths thus discovered had the good fortune to be grasped by a mind which knew how to understand what they themselves can but ambiguously express, to interpret what they are obliged to conceal and, at the same time, to appreciate the shimmering beauty, almost invisible to the majority of mankind, that shines for

a moment around all that exists, especially around that which still remains very close to nature and has hardly left its primeval sanctuary.

To make of these long annals the generous and delightful work of literature that they are and not the monotonous and arid record of finical descriptions and trivial acts that they might have been, various and so to speak conflicting gifts were needed. To the patience, the precision, the scientific minuteness, the protean and practical ingenuity, the energy of a Darwin in the face of the unknown, to the faculty of expressing what has to be expressed with order, clearness and certainty, the venerable anchorite of Sérignan adds many of those qualities which are not to be acquired, certain of those innate good poetic virtues which cause his sure and supple prose, though a trifle provincial, a trifle antiquated, a trifle primitive, to take its place among the excellent prose of the day, prose of the kind that has its own atmosphere, in which we breathe gratefully

and tranquilly and which we find only in masterpieces.

Lastly, there was needed — and this was not the least requirement of the work — a mind ever ready to cope with the riddles which, among those little objects, rise up at every step as enormous as those which fill the skies and perhaps more numerous, more imperious and more strange, as though nature had here given a freer scope to her last wishes and an easier outlet to her secret thoughts. Fabre shrinks from none of those boundless problems which are persistently put to us by all the inhabitants of that tiny world where mysteries are heaped up in a denser and more bewildering fashion than in any other. He thus meets and faces, turn by turn, the redoubtable questions of instinct and intelligence, of the origin of species, of the harmony or the accidents of the universe, of the life lavished upon the abysses of death, without counting the no less vast, but so to speak more human problems which, among infinite others, are inscribed

within the range, if not within the grasp, of our intelligence: parthenogenesis; the prodigious geometry of the wasps and bees; the logarithmic spiral of the snail; the antennary sense; the miraculous force which, in absolute isolation, without the possible introduction of anything from the outside, increases the volume of the Minotaurus' egg tenfold, where it lies, and, during seven to nine months, nourishes with an invisible and spiritual food, not the lethargy, but the active life of the scorpion and of the young of the Lycosa and the Clotho Spider. He does not attempt to explain them by one of those generally-acceptable theories, such as that of evolution, which merely shifts the ground of the difficulty and which, I may say in passing, emerges from these volumes in a somewhat sorry plight, after being sharply confronted with incontestable facts.

II

Waiting for chance or a god to enlighten us, he is able, in the presence of the un-

known, to preserve that great religious and attentive silence which is dominant in the best minds of the day. There are those who say:

"Now that you have reaped a plentiful harvest of details, you should follow up analysis with synthesis and generalize the origin of instinct in an all-embracing view."

To these he replies, with the humble and magnificent loyalty that illumines all his work:

"Because I have stirred a few grains of sand on the shore, am I in a position to know the depths of the ocean?

"Life has unfathomable secrets. Human knowledge will be erased from the archives of the world before we possess the last word that a Gnat has to say to us. . . .

"Success is for the loud talkers, the self-convinced dogmatists; everything is admitted on condition that it be noisily proclaimed. Let us throw off this sham and

recognize that, in reality, we know nothing about anything, if things were probed to the bottom. Scientifically, Nature is a riddle without a definite solution to satisfy man's curiosity. Hypothesis follows on hypothesis; the theoretical rubbish-heap accumulates; and truth ever eludes us. To know how not to know might well be the last word of wisdom."

Evidently, this is hoping too little. In the frightful pit, in the bottomless funnel wherein whirl all those contradictory facts which are resolved in obscurity, we know just as much as our cave-dwelling ancestors; but at least we know that we do not know. We survey the dark faces of all the riddles, we try to estimate their number, to classify their varying degrees of dimness, to obtain an idea of their position and their extent. That already is something, pending the day of the first gleams of light. In any case, it means doing in the presence of the mysteries all that the most upright intelligence can do to-day;

and that is what the author of this incomparable Iliad does, with more confidence than he professes. He gazes at them attentively. He wears out his life in surprising their most minute secrets. He prepares for them, in his thoughts and in ours, the field necessary for their evolutions. He increases the consciousness of his ignorance in proportion to their importance and learns to understand more and more that they are incomprehensible.

EVIL-SPEAKING

IX

EVIL-SPEAKING

I

"SEE no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil," say the three sacred monkeys carved over the gate of the Buddhist temple of Iyeyasu at Nikko.

We all of us speak ill of one another:

"No one," Pascal remarks, "speaks of us in our presence as he does in our absence. The union that exists among men is based solely on this mutual deceit; and few friendships would survive if each knew what his friend says when he is not there, though he be speaking of him in all sincerity and without passion.

"I lay it down as a fact that, if all men knew what they say of one another, there would not be four friends in this world."

If you do away with evil-speaking, you do away with three-fourths of our conver-

sation; and an unbearable silence will hover over every gathering. Evil-speaking or calumny — for it is extremely difficult to separate the two sisters; and in reality any evil-speaking is likely to be calumnious, inasmuch as we know others even less well than we know ourselves — evil-speaking, which feeds all that creates disunion between men and poisons their intercourse, is nevertheless the chief motive that brings them together and enables them to enjoy the pleasures of society.

But the ravages which it wreaks all around us are too well-known and have too often been described to make it necessary for us to portray them once again. Let us here consider only the harm which it does to him who indulges in it. It accustoms him to see only the petty sides of men and things; little by little it conceals from him the bold outlines, the great unities, the heights and depths containing the only truths that count and endure.

In reality, the evil which we find in others, the evil which we speak of them,

exists within ourselves: from ourselves we derive it; upon ourselves it recoils. We perceive clearly only those defects which are ours, or which we are on the point of acquiring. Within ourselves is kindled the evil flame whose reflection we perceive on others. Each of us diligently searches out, among those who surround him, the vice or the defect that reveals to the clear-sighted the vice or the defect to which he himself is thrall. There is no more ingenuous or intimate confession, even as there is no better examination of conscience, than to ask one's self:

"What is the fault which I most willingly impute to my neighbour?"

You may be sure that this is the fault which you are most inclined to commit and that you most readily see what is happening in the shallows to which you yourself are descending. He who speaks ill of others is, in short, merely his own traducer; and evil-speaking is, in essence, but the story of our own falls, transposed or anticipated.

Mountain Paths

2

We surround ourselves with all the evil that we attribute to the victims of our gossip. It takes form at our own expense; it lives and feeds upon the best of our substance; it accumulates all about us, peopling and encumbering our atmosphere with phantoms, at first grotesque, inconsistent, docile, timid and ephemeral, which gradually become persistent, add to their strength and stature, speak with louder voice and develop into very real and imperious entities which ere long will issue orders and assume the direction of most of our thoughts and actions. We are less and less masters in our own houses; we feel our character slowly sapped of its strength; and we find ourselves sooner or later enclosed within a sort of enchanted circle which it is all but impossible to break, a circle in which we no longer know whether we are defaming our brethren because we are growing as bad as they, or whether we are growing bad because we defame them.

Evil-Speaking

3

We should accustom ourselves to judge all men as we judge the heroes of this war. It is certain that, if any one had the pitiful courage to undertake their belittlement, he would find, in any gathering of these men, almost as many vices, pettinesses or blemishes as in any human gathering chosen at random in any town or village. He would tell you that it contained hopeless drunkards, unscrupulous libertines, uncouth, narrow and greedy peasants, mean and rapacious shopkeepers, callous, lewd and cheating artisans, sordid, envious clerks and, among young men of better birth, idle, presumptuous, selfish and arrogant wastrels. He would add that many of them did their duty only because there was no way of avoiding it; that they went forward, despite themselves, to brave a death which they hoped to escape, because they well knew that they could not escape the death which would threaten them if they refused to face the first. He

might say all this and many other things which would appear more or less true; but there is something far more true, which is the great and magnificent truth that enfolds and uplifts all the rest: it is the thing which they really did; it is the fact that they willingly offered themselves to death in order to accomplish what they regarded as a duty. It cannot be denied: if all those who had vices and imperfections and the desire to shun danger had refused to accept the sacrifice, no force in the world could have compelled them to it; for they would represent a force at least equal to that which would have sought to impel them. We must therefore believe that these imperfections, these vices, these ignoble desires were very superficial and in any case incomparably less powerful and less deeply rooted than the great flood of feeling which carried all before it. And this is why, when we think of those dead or mutilated heroes, the petty thoughts which I have described do not even enter our minds. And it is right that this should be

so. In the heroic whole they count for no more than rain-drops in the ocean. All has been swept away, all has been made equal by sacrifice, suffering and death, in the one untarnished beauty.

But let us not forget that it is almost the same with all men; and that these heroes were not of a different nature from the neighbour whom we are incessantly villifying. Death has purified and consecrated them; but we are all of us daily in the presence of the sacrifice, the suffering and, above all, the death which will purify and consecrate us in our turn. We are almost all subject to the same ordeals which, because they are less frequent and less glorious, appeal no less to the same profound virtues; and, if so many men, chosen at hazard from among us, have proved themselves worthy of our admiration, it is because, after all, we are doubtless better than we seem; for, while those others mingled in our life, even they did not appear to be much better than ourselves.

OF GAMBLING

X

OF GAMBLING

I

PAULO MINORA. This essay, I need hardly say, consists of notes made before the war and put in order now, at a time when victory allows our thoughts to stray for a moment from the great tragedy in which the destinies of mankind have been at stake. For the rest, the subject, however frivolous it may at first sight appear, sometimes touches or seems to touch problems which it is not unfitting to examine, were it only to realize that they are perhaps illusive. Moreover it is unfortunately probable that, when peace is restored, our allies will visit in too numerous and confiding crowds the dubious havens of delight which we are about to enter. I have no pretension to serve them as a guide nor to teach them how to fight against the whims of fortune; but a handful of them

may find in these lines, if not useful hints or profitable advice, at least some few reflections or observations which will pave the way for their own experiments or render them easier.

2

Let us then pay a last visit to one of those green tables which spread their length in the somewhat disreputable place of which I have written elsewhere [1] as the "Temple of Chance." To-day I would rather call it the Factory of Chance, for it is here that, for more than half a century, without respite or repose, on weekdays, Sundays and holidays alike, daily from ten o'clock in the morning till twelve o'clock at night, with croupiers unintermittently relieving one another, men have obstinately manufactured Chance and doggedly consulted the formless and featureless god that shrouds good luck and ill within his shadow.

[1] In the volume, published in 1904, entitled *The Double Garden*.— A. T. de M.

Of Gambling

We do not yet know what he is nor what he wants; we are not even sure that he exists; but surely it would be astonishing if no result of any kind, no clue to the tantalizing puzzle, had emerged from this endless effort, the most gigantic, the most costly, the most methodical that has ever been made on the brink of this gloomy abyss, if nothing had been born of all this furious work, however trivial, however unhealthy and useless it may appear.

In any case, at these tables, as at all places where passions become intensified, we are able to make interesting observations and, among other things, to behold at first hand, violently foreshortened and harshly illuminated, certain aspects of man's lifelong struggle with the unknown. The drama, which as a rule is long drawn out, projecting itself into space and time and breaking up amid circumstances that escape our eyes, is here knit together, gathered into a ball, held, so to speak, in the hollow of the hand. But, for all its speed, its abruptness of movement and its ex-

treme compression, it remains as complex and mysterious as those which go on indefinitely. Until the ivory ball that rolls and hops around the wheel falls into its red or black compartment, the unknown veiling its choice or its destiny is as impenetrable as that which hides from us the choice or the destiny of the stars. The movements of the planets can be calculated almost to a second; but no mathematical operation can measure or predict the course of the little white ball.

Your most skilful players, indeed, have given up trying. Not one of them any longer seriously relies on intuition, presentiment, second sight, telepathy, psychic forces or the calculation of probabilities in the attempt to foresee or determine the fall of a destiny no larger than a hazel-nut. All the scientific part of human knowledge has failed; and all the occult and magical side of that same knowledge has been equally unsuccessful. The mathematicians, the prophets, the seers, the sorcerers, the sensitives, the mediums, the

psychometrists, the spiritualists who call upon the dead for assistance, all alike are blind, confounded and impotent before the wheel and before Destiny's thirty-seven compartments. Here Chance reigns supreme; and hitherto, though it all happens before our eyes, though it is repeated to satiety and may be held, let me say once more, in the hollow of our hand, no one has yet been able to determine a single one of its laws.

3

Yet such laws seem to exist; and thousands of players have ruined themselves in following their forms or their elusive and deceptive traces. Let us take a bundle of those records or *permanences,* published at Monte Carlo, which give day by day the list of all the numbers that have come up at one of the roulette or *trente-et-quarante* tables. As everybody knows, these numbers are arranged in long parallel columns, the black on the left and the red on the right. When we look at one

of these sheets, containing as a rule ten columns of sixty-five numbers each — dead and harmless cyphers now, though once so dangerous, once destructive of so many hopes and perhaps inspiring more than one disaster — we observe a tendency towards a fairly perceptible equilibrium between the red and the black. Most often the two chances balance each other, singly or in little groups, a black, a red, two blacks, three reds, three blacks, two reds and so on. When we come upon a series of five, six, seven, eight, sometimes eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve consecutive blacks, we are almost certain of finding not far away a compensating series of five, six, seven, eight or ten reds. There is a very real rhythm, a sort of breathing or a cadenced movement to and fro of the mysterious creature which we call Chance. This rhythm or balance is moreover confirmed by the final statistics of the day, from which we learn that, in a total of six hundred and so many spins of the ball, the difference between the

black and the red very seldom exceeds twenty or thirty; and this difference is even smaller in the total for the week, that is to say, in a total of nearly five thousand spins, when it is usually reduced to a few units.

4

The monster has other strange habits. We see, for instance, that it is not uncommon for a number to come up twice in succession; and it is undeniable that, in each day's play, two or three numbers are obviously favoured, so much so that we may hurl out a challenge to logic and declare that the more frequently a number occurs the more chances it has of reappearing. This seems to conflict with the law of equilibrium which we have remarked; but it must be observed that this equilibrium will be recovered later, that by the end of the week the difference will no longer be very great and that they will almost disappear when the month is over. The equilibrium is more slowly restored because we must

multiply the number of series by eighteen and a half to reach the proportions of the even chances.

Players note yet another law which, for that matter, is but a corollary of the former habit, but which has something curiously human about it: the chances which lag behind show a greater eagerness to regain their lost ground at the moment that follows more or less closely upon a halt, as though they had recovered their breath after a brief rest on the landing of a staircase.

Let us add at once that it is wise to distrust these fluctuating habits and these gropings after laws. For instance, red has been known to beat black by seventy per cent. in the course of a day's play. Black, on the other hand, as people still remember at Monte Carlo, one day came up twenty-nine times in succession and the second dozen twenty-eight times without a break. Chance has not our nerves; it is not, like us, impatient to make good its losses or to carry off its gains. It takes its

time, awaits its hour and does not trouble to keep step with our ways of life.

5

Players as a rule attribute these habits or caprices to a trick of the croupier's hand. This is hardly tenable. After all, we know how the thing is done. The ball drops into its compartment and the croupier announces, for instance:

"13, black, *impair* and *manque*."

The losses are raked in, the winnings are paid out, the players renew their stakes, there is sometimes a brief dispute, somebody asks for change and so on. These operations vary a good deal in length; and all this time the wheel carrying the ball is making hundreds of revolutions. The croupier stops it at last, takes the ball, reverses the wheel and sends the ball spinning in the opposite direction. It is impossible under these conditions for his particular trick of the hand to exercise any influence whatever. Besides, we can easily see from the chart of the *permanences* that

the change of croupier does not perceptibly affect the rhythm of the even chances. It is not the man who controls the rhythm but the rhythm that controls the man.

6

These gropings after laws in what would seem a negation of all or any law; these strivings on the part of Chance to quit its own domain and to organize its chaos; this god who denies himself and seeks to destroy himself by his own hand; these incomprehensible stammerings, these awkward efforts to achieve utterance and assume consciousness are rather curious, we must admit. For the rest, it is these efforts, these hankerings after equilibrium, this embryonic rhythm that constitute the gamblers' good and bad luck. If Chance were simply Chance as we conceive it on first principles, one would stake any sum anyhow and at any moment. I am well aware that, according to the most learned theorists on roulette, each *coup* is independent of all the others and begins as if no-

thing had happened before, as if nothing were to happen afterwards, as if the table were fresh from the shop, the wheel from the factory and the croupier from the hands of God. In theory this is quite accurate; but we have just seen that in practice it does not seem to be so. For that matter, it seems impossible to explain the reason. Players are satisfied to observe the fact, while yielding to a dangerous but very human tendency to exaggerate the scope and the certainty of their observations.

They are too ready to see laws where there is only a mass of coincidences as fleeting as clouds. It is of course necessary that the reds and blacks, emerging successively from nowhere, should find a place somewhere and form certain groups; and, if it is rather surprising that at the end of the month their numbers are nearly equal, it would be no less surprising if one of the colours were to prevail largely over the other. It is perfectly true that, at first sight, the reds and blacks seem to ba-

lance on the *permanence* sheets; but it is also true that, when we examine more closely, a series of five or six reds, for instance, interrupted by one or two blacks, not infrequently begins a fresh run; and ill-luck may well have it that, at this moment, the player, in his search for equilibrium, will start punting on the black and in a few *coups* behold the disappearance of all the winnings slowly and laboriously wrested from Chance, which is niggardly when one is winning and extremely generous — to the bank — when one is losing. For that matter, he will suffer the same disappointment if he bets on the variation, in other words, against the equilibrium, and will too often discover that these laws, when he puts his trust in them, are writ in water, whereas they seem to be graven in bronze so soon as they betray him.

7

In order to profit by these laws, which are perhaps fallacious and in any case untrustworthy, and to secure himself against

their treachery, he has contrived a host of ingenious systems which sometimes enable him to win but most often merely retard his ruin.

But, before speaking of these systems, let us begin by saying that we shall concern ourselves here only with the even chances, red or black, *pair* or *impair*, *passe* or *manque*. These are sufficiently complicated in themselves and set us problems that would be enough to exhaust all the shrewdness of a human life. As for any other than the even chances, *en plein*, *à cheval*, *transversales*, *carrés*, *douzaines* and so forth, these, both in theory and in practice, escape all control, calculation or explanation.

Whatever system he adopt, the gambler is always tossing heads or tails against the bank. He has a chance and the bank has a chance; but zero gives the bank odds against him; and, though zero is apparently a very mild tax, since at *rouge-et-noir* in thirty-six chances the bank has only half a chance more than the player, it is bound

to be ruinous in the end. To escape the abruptness of a decision which, if he placed all that he possessed on the red or the black, would end the game at a single stroke, the player divides his stake, so as to be able to defy a large number of chances, hoping that, thanks to a skilfully graduated progression, he will end by lighting on a favourable series in which the gains will exceed the losses. This is the underlying principle of all the systems, which are never anything but more or less ingenious, prudent and complicated martingales. There are not, there never will be any others, in the absence of a miracle which has not yet occurred, of an intuition which foresees what the ball will decide, or of an unknown force which will oblige it to act as a player wishes.

8

I have no intention of reviewing all these systems, which are innumerable and of unequal value: the *paroli* pure and simple, that artless, violent, doubled stake

which leads straight to disaster; the D'Alembert and all its variants; the descending progressions; the differential methods; the *montant belge;* the *parolis intermittents;* the snowball; the *photographie;* the staking of equal amounts on certain groups of figures, which is a Chinese puzzle demanding days of patient observation before it is attacked; and many others which I forget, from the most clear-cut to the most mysterious, which are sold at a high price, to credulous beginners, in sealed envelopes containing what is everybody's secret and with all or nearly all of which I have become acquainted thanks to the kindness of an erudite player. A detailed account of those most frequently used will be found in D'Albigny's treatise *Les Martingales modernes,* in Gaston Vessillier's *Théorie des systèmes géométriques,* in Hulmann's *Traité des jeux dits de hasard,* in Théo d'Alost's *Théorie scientifique nouvelle des jeux de la roulette, trente-et-quarante, etc.,* and, above all, in the *Revue de Monte Carlo,* which has

given a system in every issue since the day of its foundation some fifteen years ago.

Whether mystic or transparent, all these methods present more or less the same dangers, being all founded on the quicksands of equilibrium and temporary disturbance. If they are very cautious, the loss is trifling, but the gain is still smaller; if they are bold, the gain is great, but the loss is two or three times greater. The best of them, in order to continue the defence of a moderate stake and of what has already been sacrificed, involve the risking on the cloth, at a given moment, of all the previous winnings, which are soon followed by the sums held in reserve. This is the inevitable revenge of the bank, at which you thought that you were nibbling with impunity, but which suddenly opens wide its jaws, like a blind and drowsy crocodile, and swallows profits and capital at a single gulp.

9

The players hearten themselves by maintaining that they have an incontestable

advantage over the bank. They begin to play, they "punt" when they like and as they like and they withdraw when they please, whereas the bank is compelled to play without stopping, to accept every stake and to meet every *coup* up to the limit of the maximum, which, as we know, is six thousand francs on the even chances. This advantage is a real one if the player, after winning a big sum, goes away and does not come back again. But the lucky gambler, even more infallibly than the one who has no luck, will return to the enchanted table and in so doing loses the only effective weapon that he had against his enemy. To choose your time for punting is but an illusory privilege, because everything, at any moment, is equally shifting and uncertain; and you never know beforehand when the precarious and deceptive law of equilibrium will reassert itself. After a long sequence of blacks, you wager on a fine series of reds, a certain run, you would say; but no sooner have you staked your money than the series

gives up the ghost and remorseless black resumes its devastating course; or else you do the opposite: you bet on black and it is red that settles down for a run. At whatever moment you start punting, you are always fighting red against black, that is to say, one to one. Once more, the only real advantage is that you can go away when you like; but where is the gambler, whether losing or winning, who is able to go away and not come back?

10

After mature examination, all these systems merely carve the brutal and crushing mass of luck into small pieces. They act as a defensive padding against the blows of Chance, making them less grave. They prolong the player's life or his agony. They enable the owner of a modest purse to stake as often as the multimillionaire, who would confine himself to betting double or quits indefinitely, if he were not stopped by the fatal barrier of the maximum. But all mathematical operations,

all combinations of figures flutter and struggle like blind captives between bronze walls. They merely dash themselves in vain against these walls, whether black or red: both remain invulnerable and impregnable; and from their imprisoning embrace there is no escape.

II

Does this mean that there is no such thing as a defensible method and that the most skilful calculations have not revealed a means of defeating Chance? In theory, I cannot bring myself to believe that baseless calculations will ever do what they have not done up to the present. It is none the less true that, in practice, we come upon some which struggle with fair success against ill luck. For instance, a friend of mine, a British officer, has a system which he has been using for a long time and which yields astonishing results. It is, of course, a progression, the whole of whose virtue lies in an ingenious and very simple key that seems to act as a sort of

talisman. I have not found this method in any of either the recognized or the catchpenny treatises. It has its dangers, like the others; it has its difficult moments, when, to save your anticipated profits and your earlier losses, you have to risk a rather large amount. But, if you prudently stop playing during runs which are too obstinately hostile, if you allow the storm to pass as it spreads over a large number of chances, you end by obtaining the necessary compensation. At any rate, it has never seriously failed my friend so far.

12

Nevertheless it must not be supposed that we have only to use this system blindly and automatically. As with other systems, a certain science, a certain experience, a certain deftness are indispensable. Though science and experience are evasive qualities here, fugitive and at the mercy of Chance, they are by no means illusory. The careful and experienced player understands how to approach and nurse his luck,

or at least how not to thwart it. He guesses the beginning and the end of a favourable series. He foresees alternations and intermittences; and, when he does not succeed in grasping their rhythm, he prefers to abstain from playing, rather than encounter them inopportunely. He makes more than one mistake, but makes far fewer than those who, faithful to the very scientific theory of the absolute independence of each *coup*, back either colour at any moment. He does not surrender to the fixed rigidity of logic, he does not throw the gauntlet down to fate, he does not defy the animosity of fortune. He is never obstinate. He does not struggle on, sullenly, to his last coin, against an iniquitous run, in order to gain the bitter satisfaction of learning the utmost depths of his ill luck and the injustice of fate. He has no self-conceit, no prejudices, no inflexible opinions. He is docile, plastic and accommodating. Devoid of all false shame, he cheerfully abandons his pretensions and pays court to fortune. He re-

traces his steps and retracts at fitting times. He stops, starts afresh, yields, tacks about, allows himself to be borne upon the tide and comes safely to harbour, while the arrogant, overbold and headstrong pilot founders in deep water.

Beyond all else, he studies the character and temper of the table at which he takes his seat, for each table has its psychology, its habits, its history, which vary from day to day and yet by the end of the year form a homogeneous whole wherein all temporary errors, all anomalies and injustices are compensated. The question is to know on what page of this history he should prepare to play his part. He will not learn this at once. It is of little use for him to peep at the notes and *permanences* of the players who have come before him. What he wants is the immediate contact, the very breath of the hidden god. But the god is already thrilling into life, taking shape and countenance, giving a whispered hint of his intentions, speaking words of approval or condemnation; and the tragic

struggle begins between the player, so infinitely small, and Chance, so enormous and omnipotent.

13

Now that the battle is joined, now that the player has done what he could to summon and welcome luck, there is nothing left for him to do but wait; for luck, when all is said, will remain the supreme power that pronounces the final verdict, the formidable and inevitable unknown factor in every combination. The best of systems cannot overcome an abnormal and pitiless run of bad luck which makes you stake incessantly on the losing colour. A run like this, without favourable intermittences, is extremely rare but always possible. It corresponds, for that matter, with the extraordinary strokes of good luck, which seem more frequent only because they attract more attention. From time to time we see a man, or rather let me say a woman — for it is nearly always female players who have these inspirations

— walk up to the table and with a high hand and not the least hesitation gamble *en plein* or *en cheval,* on a *transversale* or *carré,* and win time after time, as though she saw beforehand where the ball would fall. These moments of intuition are always very brief; and, if the player insists or grows stubborn, she will soon lose whatever she has won. It is none the less true that, when we observe this very obvious and striking phenomenon, we wonder whether there is not something more in it than mere coincidence. When all is said, can luck be anything other than a passing and dazzling intuition of what will flash into actuality before everybody's eyes a second later? Is not the compartment which does not yet contain the little ball, but which in an instant will snap it up and hold it, is not this compartment already, somewhere, a thing of the present and even of the past? But these are questions which would lead us too far afield in space and time.

Of Gambling

14

Be this as it may, to return to the system of which we were speaking, even if I were at liberty to divulge its secret I should not do so. I am not a very austere moralist and I look upon gambling as one of those profoundly human evils which we shall never be able to uproot and which, for all our efforts, will always reappear in a new form. Still, the least that we can do is not to encourage it. The gambler, I mean the inveterate, almost professional gambler, is not interesting. To begin with, he is an idler and nearly always a part of the world's flotsam, with no justification for his existence. If he be rich, he is making the most foolish, the most dismal use of his money that can be imagined. If he be poor, he is even less easily to be forgiven: he should know better than to sacrifice his days and too often the welfare and the peace of mind of those dependent on him to a will-o'-the-wisp. Underlying the gambler we find too often

a sluggard, an incompetent, a boneless egoist, greedy of vulgar and unmerited pleasures, a dissatisfied and inefficient individual. Gambling is the stay-at-home, imaginary, squalid, mechanical, anæmic and unlovely adventure of those who have never been able to encounter or create the real, necessary and salutary adventures of life. It is the feverish and unhealthy activity of the wastrel. It is the purposeless and desperate effort of the debilitated, who no longer possess or never possessed the courage and patience to make the honest, persevering effort, the unspasmodic, unapplauded effort which every human life demands.

There is also a great deal of puerile vanity about the gambler. Taken for all in all, he is a child still seeking his place in the universe. He has not yet realized his position. He thinks himself peerless in the face of destiny. In his self-infatuation he expects the unknown or the unknowable to do for him what it does not do for any one whomsoever. And he ex-

pects this for no reason, simply because he is himself and because others have not that privilege. He must tempt fate incessantly, hurriedly, anxiously, in I know not what idle and pretentious hope of learning to know himself from without. Whatever fortune's decision may be, he will find cause for preening himself. If he have no luck, he will feel flattered because he is specially persecuted by fortune; if he be lucky, he will think all the more highly of himself because of the exceptional gifts which she bestows upon him. For the rest, he does not need to believe that he deserves these gifts; on the contrary, the less right he has to them, the prouder he will be of them; and the unjust and manifestly undeserved chance which makes them his will form the best part of the vainglorious satisfaction which he will contrive to extract from them.

15

It would be extremely surprising, I said when I began, if this indefatigable and

exhaustive enquiry into Chance, pursued for over fifty years, had failed to yield some sort of result. I am wondering, at the end of this investigation, what that result is. At the cost of an insane waste of money, time, physical, nervous and moral energy and spiritual forces perhaps more precious still, it has taught us that Chance is in short Chance, that is to say, an aggregate of effects whereof we do not know the causes. But we knew as much as this before; and our new discovery is a little derisory. We have seen the shadowy appearance of certain laws or habits from which a few players appear to derive advantage, though this advantage is always precarious. But these apparent laws, which tend obscurely and uncertainly to instil a little order into Chance, are, like Chance itself, but inconsistent and ephemeral summaries of results from unknown causes. Upon the whole we have learnt nothing, unless perhaps it be that we were wrong to attach greater importance to those manifestations of destiny than they

possess. If we look at them more closely, we find that there is nothing more behind all these catastrophes and all these mysteries of luck than the catastrophe and the mysteries which we put there. We link our fate to the fate of a little ball which is not responsible for it; and, because we entrust it for a moment with our fortune, we fondly imagine that mysterious moral powers are bent on directing and ending its course at the right or wrong moment. It knows nothing of all this; and, though the lives of thousands of men depended on its fall to the right or the left of the point at which it stops, it would not care. It has laws of its own, which it must obey and which are so complex that we do not even try to explain them. It is just a little ball, honestly seeking the little red or black hole in which to go to sleep and having nothing very much to tell us of the secrets of a luck or destiny which exist only within ourselves.

THE RIDDLE OF PROGRESS

XI

THE RIDDLE OF PROGRESS

I

THIS war, which is one such as had never yet been waged upon this earth of ours, leads us to consider the great problem of the future of mankind.

Dare we hope that humanity will one day renounce these monstrous follies and that they will become altogether impossible? To this question, if we wish to meet it at its source, I see but one reply, which I have already given elsewhere and which I will here recapitulate and complete, namely, that we are engulfed in a universe which has no more limit in time than it has in space, which had no beginning, as it will have no end, and which has behind it as many myriads of myriads of years as it discovers ahead of it. Yesterday's eternity and to-morrow's are precisely identical. All that the universe is going to do it must have already done, for it has had

as many opportunities of doing so as it will ever have. All the things that it has not done are things which it will never be able to do, because nothing will be added, in space or time, to what it has already possessed in space or time. It has necessarily made in the past all the efforts and all the experiments which it will make in the future; and all that has gone before, having been subject to the same chances, is perforce the same as all that is to follow.

2

It is probable, therefore, that there was once an infinity of worlds similar to our own, even as it is likely that there is an infinity of such similar worlds at present, the infinity of space being comparable with that of time. These coincidences, however difficult for us to picture, must inevitably occur and recur in the immeasurable and the innumerous in which we are immersed, that is, unless the infinity of possible combinations be less unlimited than those of time and space.

This is where our capacity of imagination halts, for it is easier for us to conceive the infinities of space and time than the infinity of combinations. To obtain some idea of the latter, we should have to understand the substance and the nature, the laws and the forces, in a word, the whole riddle of existence. None the less is it true that this possible infinity of combinations is our only hope; without it there would be nothing more to expect of a universe which obviously would have tried and exhausted everything before our coming.

But, if this number of combinations is really infinite, it is open to us to say that the earth is an experiment which had not yet been made and an experiment which has failed, since suffering and evil have the upper hand of happiness and goodness. If the experiment has failed, we are its victims; but we are not forbidden to hope that our efforts will in some way modify combinations which will be more fortunate in other places or at another time. If the

experiment has failed, it does not follow that others have not succeeded and are not more fortunate, at this very moment, in other worlds than ours. We may even suppose that, in the infinity of these combinations and experiments, the most successful tend to become fixed and crystallized and that, in view of their infinite number, they will bring about successfully in the future what they have not brought about successfully in the past. This is a hazardous glimmer; but I doubt whether any others will be discovered to keep us uplifted above despair.

3

Let us for a moment assume that the experiment of this world had not miscarried as it has; that the mind of man, which, since the beginning, has been struggling painfully against matter and winning but a few brief, uncertain and precarious victories, were a million times more powerful and better-armed. It would no doubt have triumphed over all that weighs us

down and keeps us where we are; it would have freed itself from the apparently illusory fetters of space and time. It is not unreasonable to admit that, among the myriads of worlds which people the infinite, there are some in which these better conditions are realized. Perhaps, after all, it would be impossible to imagine anything that does not exist somewhere in reality, for we may very rightly maintain that our imaginings can be nothing more than stray reflections of things that already exist. Now, if we lived in one of those worlds and if we could see, as we should perhaps be allowed to see, all that is happening at this moment on the earth which we now inhabit and on others which are perhaps even worse and more unfortunate, it seems to us that we should know neither rest nor ease until we had intervened and helped to make it better and wiser and more habitable.

4

For that matter, no one can tell us that this is not so now and that all our spiritual

victories, all that seems, at certain moments, to be leading us towards a future less hideous than the past, all the mysterious currents of good that sometimes flow through our world, all that awaits us after death, no one, I say, can tell us that all this is not due to the intervention of one of those worlds. It is true that we cannot perceive the act of intervention, that we are hardly sensible of it; but it is also true that these creatures of a higher world, being of necessity less encumbered with matter and more spiritual than we, must necessarily remain invisible to us. In the infinity of the firmament we discover myriads of worlds that are material worlds like our own; and we are able to discover only these, because all that does not more or less closely resemble our own world must needs escape us. But the space lying between the stars, which to us appears void, is infinitely wider than the space which they themselves occupy; and it would be strange indeed if it were not filled with worlds which we cannot perceive at all, or

rather if it were not itself one vast world which our eyes are incapable of taking in.

It is, moreover, thinkable that, if we do not see these other worlds, they, not being material worlds, do not perceive matter and are consequently as unaware of us as we are unaware of them; for we are doubtless mistaken in believing that, because we are visible to one another, we are necessarily visible to all other beings. On the contrary, there is reason to presume that these spiritual beings pass through us without suspecting our presence and that, as they are conscious and sensible only of that which emanates from the spirit, they do not suspect or discover our existence except in so far as we approach the conditions in which they exist.

5

Consider the earth in its origin: at first, a shapeless nebula, becoming gradually more and more condensed; next, a globe of fire, of rocks in fusion, whirling for millions of years through space, with no

other object than that of forming into a mass and cooling: an inconceivable incandescence, which none of our sources of heat can enable us to picture; an essential, scientific, absolute barrenness which may well have proclaimed itself irremediable and everlasting. Who would have thought that from these torrents of matter in eruption, which seemed to have destroyed for ever all life or the least germ of life, there would emerge each and every form of life itself, from the most enormous, the strongest, the most enduring, the most impetuous, the most abundant, down to the slightest, the least visible, the most precarious, the most ephemeral, the most exiguous? Who above all could have dared foresee that they would give birth to what seems so utterly alien to the liquefied or pasty rocks and metals that alone formed the surface, the nucleus and the very entity of our globe, I mean our human intelligence and consciousness?

The Riddle of Progress

6

Is it possible to imagine a more unexpected evolution and ending? What could astonish us after so great an astonishment and what are we not entitled to hope of a world which, after being what it was, has produced what we see and what we are? Considering that it started from a sort of negation of life, from integral barrenness and from worse than nothing, in order to end in us, where will it not end after starting from ourselves? If its birth and formation have elaborated such prodigies, what prodigies may not its existence, its indefinite prolongation and its dissolution hold in store for us? There are an immeasurable distance and inconceivable transformations between the one frightful material of the early days and the human thought of this moment; and there will doubtless be a like distance and like transformations as difficult to conceive between the thought of this moment and that which will succeed it in the infinity of time.

It seems as if, in the beginning, our earth did not know what to do with its material and with its force, which inter-devoured each other. In the vast, flaming void in which it was being consumed, it had not yet the shadow of an object or an idea; to-day, it has so many that our scholars wear out their lives to no purpose in seeking them and are overwhelmed by the number of its mysterious and inexhaustible combinations.

At that time it disposed of but a single force, the most destructive that we knew, fire. If everything was born of fire, which itself seemed to be born only to destroy, what will not be born of that which seems to be born only to produce, beget and multiply? If it was able to do so much with the lava and the red-hot cinders which were the only elements that it possessed, what will it not be able to do with all that it will end by possessing?

7

It is well sometimes to tell ourselves that we are at least living in a world which has

not yet exhausted its future and which is much nearer to its beginning than to its end. It was born only yesterday and has but lately disentangled its original chaos. It is at the starting-point of its hopes and its experiments. We believe that it is making for death, whereas all its past, on the contrary, shows that it is much more probably making for life. In any case, as its years pass by, the quantity and still more the quality of the life which it engenders and maintains tend to increase and to improve. It has given us only the first-fruits of its miracles; and in all likelihood there is no more connection between what it was and what it is than there will be between what it is and what it will be. No doubt, when its greatest marvels burst into being, we shall no longer possess the lives which we possess to-day; but we shall still be there under another form, we shall still be existing somewhere, on its surface or in its depths; and it is not utterly improbable that one of its last prodigies will reach us in our dust, awaken us and recall

us to life, in order to impart to us at last the share of happiness which we had not enjoyed and to teach us that we were wrong not to interest ourselves, on the further side of our graves, in the destiny of this earth of ours, of which we had never ceased to be the immortal offspring.

THE TWO LOBES

XII

THE TWO LOBES

I

A SOLDIER writes me the following letter from the front:

"There are quagmires and skeletons in the forest. I have discovered and admired the ruined gods under the still living and wonderful vegetation: their spirit has evaporated. The odour of Christ has little charm for me; I prefer that of Buddha. What I adore in him is the fundamental contradiction that seeks to assure us of our immortality by proving our inevitable annihilation. He taught, in the same breath, the illusion of the Ego and its periodical reincarnation, an obvious absurdity which implies a knowledge of the profoundest truth, of the very nature of being, at the same time and alternately collective and

individual. This discovery, which he did not formulate, should have led him elsewhere than to Nirvana, that paradise of unripe fruits. . . .

"Man is so fashioned as to perceive only one half of the universe; and the mind of ordinary texture sees barely a hemisphere of truth. Afflicted with a congenital 'nervous headache,' humanity thinks with only one half of its brain, with the eastern lobe or the western, the ancient or the modern; its mind nibbles its own tail; the antinomies pursue one another in an endless circle, which Kant believed that he had discovered, but which Buddha had striven to open. He possessed the complementary virtues; he was religious and rational; while he summed up within himself the mysticism of the east, his was the most scientific of the minds of antiquity, at a time when science did not exist but was merged in philosophy. The moderns who have sought to condense into a system the collective and hardly initiated effort of science have pitiably failed, for they have

thought only as westerners, entangled in the contradiction of idealistic aspirations and materialistic arguments, whereas Buddha's formula might still and almost without breaking down contain this gigantic effort and yet not hamper it. From the death of the prince-philosopher, down to the flights of contemporary science, true thought has not advanced one step; Arab or Christian spiritualism and its reagent, positivist or scientific materialism, are recoils in contrary directions, false monisms which, taking the extreme for the supreme, seek to fix the centre of gravity on the circumference of the wheel. The explorers of the Beyond must set out from the cross-roads of religious synthesis and scientific analysis and drag these rival sisters by the hand.

" Truth shines at the centre of a circle of onlookers and we must pass through its flame to recognize a brother in the adversary opposite. We must reach the centre of space to discern the identity of its cardinal points: '*Totum et Nihil, Alter et*

Ego.' The longing to convert others must yield to the need of completing and balancing our own point of view. In the sacred forest, which pioneers have penetrated on all sides and in all ages, the more greatly daring must necessarily draw nearer one to the other. Even if they cannot meet, they can hear one another and give one another mutual encouragement. The most modest cry of discovery may be welcome in the solitude and silence in which the truth of the future is ripening. . . ."

2

I thought it well to preserve this page. It sets forth, in a remarkable, though perhaps too rapid summary, two or three of the great problems which in reality are only one and to which, unless we give up everything, we are bound to attempt the answer: the problems of immortality or annihilation, of flux and reflux, of existence alternatively collective and individual, of exteriorization and interiorization, which make up the mighty cosmic rhythm

whereof our life and death are but infinitesimal pulsations.

3

But let us begin by observing that the fundamental contradiction which seeks to assure us of our immortality by proving our inevitable annihilation is not to be found in Buddha and that it is not true to say that he teaches in the same breath the illusion of the Ego and its periodical reincarnation. The doctrine of reincarnation is not Buddha's. He found it ready-made; it existed before him and was so deeply rooted in his people that he does not even dream of disputing it. From the exoteric point of view, he tries only to disarm it, to deprive it of its sting, to render it harmless. He tries to reduce life to the point where it can find nothing wherewith to reincarnate itself. According to the exoteric doctrine, which is but a preparation for esoteric truth, life is naught but suffering; and its only aim is the redemption or the extinction of suffering. This

extinction is to be found in Nirvana, which is not annihilation but the absorption of the individual into the universe. Ordinary death, by reason of the perpetual reincarnation of the same individual, cannot suppress suffering. We must therefore find a sort of superdeath, which makes any reincarnation impossible; and this superdeath can be obtained only by the man who has been striving to die all his life long and who has deliberately cut off all the ties that bind him to existence: all love, all hope, all desire, all possession. When, at the end of this systematic and voluntary superdeath, the actual death arrives, it will no longer find a living germ capable of achieving reincarnation. This superdeath, thus obtained, will precede by many centuries or millenaries purification, final redemption and the absorption into the absolute One.

It has been said that this is exactly the reverse of the doctrine of Christ. With Buddha, life is only the gate of death; with Christ, death is the gate of life. In

reality, it is the same thing and everything ends by the absorption into the divine, for the doctrine of Christ is nothing more than a mutilated branch of the great trunk of the mother religion.

Here we have the solution offered to us by the most wonderful mind, the greatest sage that humanity has ever known; by one who knew things which we no longer know and which, it may be, we shall never recover. It is the foundation of the religion of five hundred millions of men. There is nothing nearer to the ultimate truth.

4

Let us observe, however, that the problem of immortality or annihilation ought not to be set in these terms, since the word annihilation cannot be employed, save in a metaphorical sense, to denote a life which we no longer comprehend, seeing that Nihil or nothingness is the one thing whose existence is utterly impossible and whose non-existence is absolutely certain.

As for immortality, here again there is

ambiguity, for, as annihilation cannot exist, immortality is inevitable; and the only question that remains to be solved is whether this immortality will or will not be accompanied by some sort of continuance of our present consciousness.

But, while it is probable that the problem of immortality, more or less accompanied by consciousness, will long remain in suspense, the answer to the problem of the "nervous headache," or rather of congenital hemiphlegia, is doubtless easier to find. In any case, it occupies a domain which our direct investigations are able to explore. It is, after all, an historical and geographical question. It seems that there are in fact in the human brain an eastern lobe and a western lobe, which have never acted at the same time. The one produces, here, reason, science and consciousness; the other secretes, yonder, intuition, religion and subconsciousness. One reflects only the infinite and the unknowable; the other is interested only in what it is able to delimit, in what it may

hope to understand. They represent, employing a perhaps imaginary image, the conflict between the material and the moral ideal of humanity. They have more than once endeavoured to penetrate each other, to mingle and to work in concert; but the western lobe, at least over the most active part of the world, has hitherto paralysed and almost annihilated the efforts of the other. We are indebted to it for extraordinary progress in all the material sciences, but also for such catastrophes as those which we are undergoing to-day, catastrophes which, if we are not careful, will not be the last nor the worst. The time would seem to have come to awaken the paralysed lobe; but we have neglected it so greatly that we no longer quite know what it is capable of doing.

HOPE AND DESPAIR

XIII

HOPE AND DESPAIR

I

THE same soldier, who has become my war-time "god-child," writes to me again:

"I experience an ineffable delight in remaining the average man and in professing emptiness. I felt a great peace descend within me on the day when I resigned myself to the common lot, in other words, to ignorance and death. I have found life by renouncing it and, now that I am no longer anything, I feel rich indeed. Do not tempt me in the direction of that subtle spiritual vanity which constitutes one of the most formidable obstacles to the final liberation from self. Proud I certainly was and I am still only too much so; but we cannot extract virtues otherwise than

from our vices. More ardently than when I embraced the phantom of individual superiority, I stretch my arms towards homogeneous equality, towards the fullness of vacancy. . . ."

2

He is right; but he is thinking, here, with the eastern lobe of his brain, the Asiatic lobe; and the philosophy of this lobe counsels only inaction and renunciation, the "enchantment of the disenchanted," as Renan used to say, or rather the satisfaction of despair. Certainly all we that see, all that we feel and all that we know pledges us to this despair, which our meditations — above all, those of this same Asiatic lobe — may, for that matter, render very spacious and as beautiful, almost as habitable, as hope. But what do we know, as compared with what we do not know? We are ignorant of all that goes before and of all that comes after us, in a word, of the whole universe. Our despair, which appears at first the last word

and the last effort of wisdom, is therefore based upon what we know, which is nothing, whereas the hope of those whom we believe to be less wise can be based upon what we do not know, which is everything.

Moreover, if we would be quite just, there is more than one reason for hoping which we will not recall here; let us confess therefore that in this nothing which we know there exists naught but despair and that hope can lie only in that everything which we do not know. But, instead of listening only to our eastern lobe, which counsels us to accept this inactive ignorance and to bury our lives therein, is it not more reasonable at the same time to set our western lobe to work, the lobe which seeks to discover that everything? It is possible that here too, when all is said, it will find despair; but it is unlikely, for we cannot imagine a world which would be merely an act of despair. Now, if the world is not an act of despair, nothing that exists in it has reason to despair. In any case and in the meanwhile, this

search will doubtless permit us to hope as long as the world exists.

3

One of the most dangerous temptations that assail him who scrutinizes nature and who sees, as he advances in his enquiries, that her mysteries become more and more numerous, reaching forth unendingly in every direction, is the temptation to grow discouraged by the impossible task and to abandon it. He drops his weapons. On the last slope of life particularly, he is too much inclined to resign himself, to go no farther forward, to make no further effort, to fall into a humour of saying, "What is the good?" and to drop asleep and learn nothing more, since he has learnt that he will never know anything.

He is already sensible of this wish to surrender at discretion when he considers the humblest, the lowliest of the sciences. What will it be when he attempts to embrace them all? The mind goes astray, becomes dizzy, asks to close its eyes. It

must not close them. That would be the basest treachery that man could commit. We have no other thing to do in this life of ours than to seek to know where we are. We find no other reason for our existence; we have no other duty. Not to know is merely vexatious; no longer to seek to know is the supreme, the irremediable misfortune, the unpardonable desertion.

4

Yet, without renouncing, it is not well that we should feed ourselves upon too petty illusions. We should always keep before our eyes certain verities which put us in our place. There is no doubt that we shall never know everything; and so long as we do not know everything we shall be just as though we knew nothing. It is extremely possible, as the Rig-Veda suggests, that God Himself, or the first cause, does not know everything. It is equally possible that the universe has not yet, in any of its parts, become conscious of itself; that it knows not whence it came

nor whither it is going, what it was nor what it will be, what it has accomplished nor what it is seeking to accomplish; and, on the other hand, it is probable that, if it has not yet learnt these things, it will never learn them, seeing that, as I have already said, there is no reason why it should be able, in the infinity of time which will come after us, to do what it has not been able to do in the infinity of time which went before.

5

If there be a consciousness of the universe, a God, He knows all that He should know, or He will never know it. And, if He knows it, why has He done what He has done, which cannot lead to anything, seeing that He might already have led us where we ought to go? Why did He not prefer nothingness, or at least that which we call nothingness, the only form of lasting happiness, immovable, incontestable and comprehensible?

We could understand, if need were, an immobile, immutable, eternal universe, a

finished universe; but we cannot understand a universe in movement, or one, at least, of which all the parts that we see are incessantly in movement, evolving through space and time, a universe hurling itself at a dizzy rate of speed towards an end which it will never attain, since it has not yet attained it.

We may say, to console ourselves, that all despair comes only from the limited nature of our purview; but it is fair to add that our purview limits all hope in the same way.

MACROCOSM AND MICROCOSM

XIV

MACROCOSM AND MICROCOSM

I

THE biologists tell us that the human embryo repeats, very rapidly during the early months of its development and more slowly during the later months, all the forms of life which preceded man upon this earth.

The round speck which is the germ becomes a hollow sphere, a sort of sac with a double wall, which is known as the gastrula and whose orifice of invagination, when it closes, receives the name of the blastopore. This is protozoic life, the as yet gelatinous beginning of animal life, and is followed, after transformations that would take too long to enumerate, by polypoid life.

Next, on either side of the head, appear the branchial arches, corresponding with the gills of the fish. At the end of the

first month, the limbs are still no more than mere buds; on the other hand, the embryo is provided with a tail, which, folded against the body, nearly touches the forehead. It now has the appearance of a tadpole and lives a life which is wholly aquatic, bathed in the amniotic fluid which represents for it the water in which the embryos of fish and frogs move about freely.

It now becomes a matter of forming a resolution and knowing what to do with it. The embryo is almost in the situation occupied by life at the origin of the species; and nature, as though to humiliate man or to humiliate herself by remembering her mistakes and hesitations, returns to her gropings, her asymmetrics, her repentances, her unsuccessful experiments. Tentative forms, such as the dorsal cord, are reabsorbed; the primitive kidneys disappear, to make room for the final kidneys, which are enormous, filling the greater portion of the peritoneal cavity. Enormous too is the liver, which invades almost

the whole of the visceral cavity; enormous the head, almost as large as the rest of the body; and in this enormous head the primitive ocular vesicles are formed, themselves enormous, as is the umbilical vesicle. This is the incoherent and monstrous period corresponding with the period of madness and gigantism when nature, as yet inexperienced, was blindly sketching uncertain creatures, formidable, unbalanced and anomalous, birds, crocodiles, elephants and fish in one, as though she had not as yet decided what to do, not yet completed her classifications, disentangled her laws, or acquired the sense of proportion, of balance, or of conditions essential to the maintenance of the life which she was creating.

2

This, roughly speaking, is the recapitulation which occurs before our eyes, but of which, no doubt, many incidents escape us or do not sufficiently attract our attention, for it is possible that they reproduce types

with which we are not acquainted and which have not even left geological traces, seeing that the number of species which have disappeared is infinitely greater than that of the species which we know.

Dr. Hélan Jaworski may therefore very justly assert that the embryonic period corresponds with the geological period. And, even as, in the great terrestrial evolution, we observe the gradual disappearance of the armour-plated fishes, the monstrous reptiles and the gigantic mammals, so, in the minor embryonic evolution, we see the primitive kidney, the dorsal cord and the umbilical vesicle dissolve, while the liver diminishes and the disproportion between the head and the rest of the body is lessened. In a word, nature is learning wisdom, recognizing her errors, profiting by her experience, doing her best to repair her blunders and acquiring a sense of equilibrium, economy and form.

Dr. Jaworski finds other analogies between the geological period corresponding with man's appearance upon earth and the

birth of the child, analogies which are ingenious, but rather more hazardous. Birth is in fact preceded by a miniature deluge, caused by the tearing of the foetal envelopes, which allow the amniotic fluid to escape. Then the child, at the moment of entering into life, suddenly experiences a sort of glacial period; it passes, in fact, from an environment with a temperature of over 98° to the outer air, which is barely 60° or 65°. The sense of cold is so terrible that it wrests a first cry of suffering from the new-born child.

3

What is the meaning of this strange recapitulation?

Dr. Jaworski thinks that, if the brief process of embryonic evolution which prepares the way for the birth of man repeats the great process of terrestrial evolution, this latter, on its side, might well be but a vast embryonic period that is preparing for a birth which we cannot as yet imagine. I do not know whether he will succeed in

maintaining this stupendous theory. If he does, he will really have made us, as he promises to do, "take a step towards the essence of things." Meanwhile, thanks to his preparatory studies, he will always have made us take another and a very useful step towards a truth which this time is incontestable, which, though less unexpected, has never been elucidated with so much patience and which is no less big with consequences.

4

Dr. Jaworski, then, undertakes to demonstrate that the human body unites in itself, in a plainly recognizable form, all the living creatures which now exist upon earth and which have existed since the origin of life. In other words, each creature sums up in itself all those which have preceded it; and man, the last-comer, contains within himself the whole biological tree, so much so that, if we could distribute his body, if we could segregate each of his organs and keep it alive in isolation, we

should be able to reconstitute all existing forms, to repeople the earth with all the species which it has borne, from the primitive protoplasm to the synthesis, the final achievement, which is man.

We might perhaps go farther than Dr. Jaworski and declare, with the occultists of the east, that we likewise contain within us, in the germ or in a rough-hewn state, all the creatures and all the forms that will come after us. But here we should be leaving the domain of science proper to lose ourselves in a speculation which by its very nature is incapable of verification.

5

So it is not merely in a figurative sense, such as that foreshadowed by the current idiom, where it speaks of the vascular tree, the branches of nerves, or the ovarian cluster; it is not merely by analogy, but in a literal and strictly scientific sense that our heart, fundamentally, is nothing but a medusa and our kidneys sponges, that our intestines represent the polyps and our

skeleton the polypites, that our reproductive organs are worms or molluscs, that the vertebral column and the spinal marrow take the place of the Echinodermata, while the Brachiopoda and the Ctenophora would be derived from our eye and the reptiles found in our digestive apparatus, the birds in our respiratory organs and so on.

I repeat, there is no question here of metaphors or of more or less approximate, elastic and plausible correspondences but of rigorously and meticulously established proofs.

I cannot, of course, set before you the details of Dr. Jaworski's exegesis. It would not permit of the slightest solution of continuity and, in the three volumes published so far, it leads us to conclusions which are very difficult to contest. People used to assert, without attaching too much faith to what they said or scrutinizing it too closely, that man is a microcosm. It seems to be clearly proved to-day that this is not merely literally defensible, but

scientifically accurate. We are a prehistoric colony, immense and innumerous, a living agglomeration of all that lives, has lived and probably will live upon earth. We are not only the sons or brothers of the worms, the reptiles, the fish, the frogs, the birds, the mammals and no matter what monsters have defiled or affrighted the surface of the globe: we bear them within us; our organs are no other than themselves; we nourish all their types; they are only awaiting an opportunity to escape from us, to reappear, to reconstitute themselves, to develop and to plunge us once again into terror. In this respect, quite as much as in respect of the secret thoughts, the vices and the phantoms with which we are filled, we might repeat the words which Emerson's old man used to speak to his children, when they were frightened by a strange face in the dark passage:

"Children, you will never see anything worse than yourselves!"

If all the species were to disappear and

only man remained, none would be lost and all might be reborn of his body, as though they were coming out of Noah's ark, from the almost invisible protozoa down to the formidable antediluvian colossi which could lick the roofs of our houses.

It is therefore fairly probable that all these species take part in our existence, in our instincts, in all our feelings, in all our thoughts; and here once more we are led back to the great religions of India, which foresaw all the truths that we are gradually discovering and which already, thousands of years ago, were telling us that mañ is everything and that he must recognize his essence in every living creature.

HEREDITY AND PRE-EXISTENCE

XV

HEREDITY AND PREEXISTENCE

I

THE law of heredity which insists that the descendants shall suffer by the faults and profit by the virtues of their ancestors comprises truths that are no longer disputed. They shine forth, visible to the eyes of all. The child of a drunkard will bear the burden of his father's vice all his life long, from the day of his birth to that of his death, in body and in mind. One might say that by this irrefutable example nature had intended ostentatiously to affirm and manifest the implacable character of her law, as though to make us understand that she takes no account whatever of our conceptions of justice and injustice and that she acts on an unvarying principle in all the obscure circumstances in which we cannot follow the

inextricable windings of her will. This example, if we had no other, would be enough to brand that inhuman will with infamy. There is no law more repugnant to our reason, to our sense of responsibility, nor one which does a deeper injury to our trust in the universe and the unknown spirit that rules it. Of all life's injustices, this is the most glaring and the least comprehensible. For most of the others we find excuses or explanations; but, when we remember that a new-born child, a child which did not ask to be born, is, from the moment of inhaling its first breath of air, smitten with irremediable insolvency, with a ferocious, irrevocable sentence and with evils which it will drag to the grave, it seems to us that not one of the most hateful tyrants that history has cursed would have dared to do what nature does quietly every day.

But do we really bear the burden of the errors of the dead? In the first place, is it quite certain that the dead are really dead and no longer dwell within us? It

is a fact that we continue them, that we are the durable part of what they were. We cannot deny that we are still subject to their influence, that we reproduce their features and their characters, that we represent them almost entirely, that they continue to live and to act in us; it is therefore very natural that they also should continue to bear the consequences of an action or a way of living which their departure has not interrupted.

"But," you may say, "I had no part in this action, this habit, this vice for which I am paying to-day. I was not consulted; I had no opportunity of uttering a protest, of checking my father, or my grandfather, as he went to his ruin down the fatal precipice. I was not born; I did not yet exist!"

How do you know? May there not be a fundamental mistake in the idea of heredity as we conceive it? At one end of the beam of those scales which we accuse of injustice hangs heredity, but the other is borne down by something dif-

ferent, which we have never taken into account, for it has not yet a name, something which is the antithesis of heredity, which cleaves into the future instead of emerging from the past and which we might call preexistence or prenatality.

Even as our dead still live in us, so we have already lived in them. There is no reason to believe that the future, which is full of life, is less active and less potent than the past, which is full of the dead. Instead of descending, should we not rather ascend the course of the years to discover the source of our actions?

We know not in what fashion those already dwell in us who shall be born of us, down to the last generation; but that they do dwell in us is certain. Whatever the number of our descendants, in the sequence of the ages, whatever the transformations which the elements, climates, countries and centuries may cause them to undergo, they will keep intact, through all vicissitudes, the principle of life which they have derived from us. They have not obtained it

elsewhere or they could not be what they are. They have really issued from us; and, if they have issued from us, it is because they were in us from the first. What were they doing within us, all these innumerable, accumulated lives? Is it permissible to suppose that they were absolutely inactive? Then what were their functions, what their power? What divided them from us? When did we begin, where did they end? At what point did their thoughts and their desires mingle with ours?

"How could they think and act in us," you ask, "having as yet no brain?"

True; but they had ours. The dead too are without a brain; nevertheless no one will deny that they continue to think and act in us. This brain of which we are so proud is not the source but the condenser of thought and will. Like the Leyden jar or the Ruhmkorff coil, it exists, it is animated only so long as the electric fluid of life passes through it or resides in it. It does not produce this fluid, it collects

it; what matters is not its convolutions, which may be compared with the windings of an induction-coil, but the life that flows through it; and what can this life be, if it be not the sum of all the existences which are accumulated within us, which are not extinguished at our death, which begin before our birth and which continue us, forwards, and backwards, into the infinity of time?

2

Writers of essays and novels have at times endeavoured to represent these diverse lives which we harbour within us; and each of us, if he question himself sincerely and profoundly, will discover in himself two or three clearly-defined types, which have nothing in common but the body in which they reside, which rarely agree among themselves, which are incessantly striving to gain the upper hand and which put up with one another as best they can, in order to go through an existence whose aggregate forms our ego. This ego will be good or bad, remarkable or

insignificant, more or less generous or selfish, calm or uneasy, pacific or pugnacious, heroic or pusillanimous, hesitating or decided and enterprising, brutal or refined, crafty or loyal, active or idle, chaste or lascivious, modest or vainglorious, proud or obsequious, unreliable or steadfast, according to the authority which the type that captures the best positions of the heart or brain is able to assume over the others. But, even in the life that appears the most stable, the most homogeneous, the best-balanced, this authority will never be final or undisputed. The dominant type will find itself forever disputed, attacked, thwarted, disturbed, circumvented, harassed, tempted, deceived, betrayed and sometimes cunningly dethroned by one of the rival or subordinate types which it failed to distrust or which it did not watch narrowly enough. We behold unexpected coalitions, fantastic compromises, regrettable defections, fierce competitions, incessant intrigues and positive revolutions, especially at the critical periods and at each

moment of important happenings; and all this prodigious inward tragedy does not cease for an instant until the hour of death.

3

But, once again, why seek only in the past and among our ancestors for the actors in this drama which is the essential drama of humanity? What justification have we for supposing that the dead alone play all the parts? Why should those from whom we have issued possess more influence than those who will issue from us? The first are remote from our bodily selves, they are separated from us by unfathomable mysteries and their survival may perhaps be called in question; the others inhabit our flesh and their existence is incontestable. We have just seen that the argument deduced from the absence of any brain is not invincible.

"But," you will perhaps go on to say, "how do you suppose that, when they have

not yet lived, they can possess habits, virtues and vices, preferences and experience, in a word, all that constitutes a character and cannot be acquired save by contact with life?"

But the same objection could be raised, in most cases, with regard to our ancestors. Generally speaking, when we issued from them, they were still young; they were not yet what they became and what we shall become after them. They had not yet adopted the habits, the ways of thinking or feeling, or cultivated the virtues or the vices which are reproduced in us. The stubborn little mediocrity whom we all feel within us, frugal, cautious and shabby in his dealings, was still perhaps a prodigal, high-spirited and reckless youth; the rake was still perhaps chaste, the thief had never stolen and the murderer may have had a horror of bloodshed. All this is almost equally immaterial and equally potential in both cases; the only present points at issue are the amorphous tenden-

cies and forces whereon the brain which we receive from these and pass on to those bestows a form.

It is therefore very possible that the little mediocrity, the rake, the thief or the murderer, far from being dead, are not yet born and are taking as active a part as our ancestors in the agitations and sometimes in the conduct of our existence. This is what the most ancient and the most venerable religions of humanity always foresaw or revealed, receiving it perhaps on the authority of an unknown and loftier source; and of these religions Christianity, with its dogma of original sin, is but an imperfect echo. Even to-day, more than six hundred millions of human beings believe in the preexistence of the soul, in successive lives and in reincarnation. In the eyes of these religions, the little mediocrity who begot us several centuries ago is the same who, a little less paltry, a little less narrow, improved by his previous life and his passage through the mysteries of death, is awaiting within us the moment

of rebirth and who, while waiting, shares our instincts, our feelings and our thoughts. He does not wait in solitude; he is but one life in the host of lives which have preceded us and which come back to live in us again; and all these past and future lives form the sum total of our own.

4

We will not here discuss this doctrine of successive lives and of the expiatory and purifying reincarnation, which is the noblest and, up to now, the only acceptable explanation of nature's injustices that has been discovered. In the present state of our knowledge, it can be only a magnificent theory or a statement impossible of proof. Let us not forsake the indisputable ground on which heredity and preexistence have their being. Heredity is an acquired fact, an experimental truth; preexistence is a logical necessity. It is not indeed possible to conceive that what will be born of us does not already exist within us in fact, in principle, in the germ,

in essence or in potentiality; and, from the moment of its existence in a fashion probably more spiritual than material, it is far less surprising that it should be more or less responsible for thoughts and actions to which it could not be wholly a stranger.

In any case, heredity, which is incontestable, and preexistence, which is necessary, remind us yet once again that each of us is not a single being, isolated, permanent, hermetically sealed, independent of others and separated from all things in time and space, but a porous vase dipping into the infinite; a sort of cross-roads, where all the paths of the past, the present and the future meet; an inn beside the eternal highways, where all the lives which make up our own foregather for a few days' sojourn. We believe ourselves dead when they leave the inn; and we fancy that they too have perished. It is more likely that this is not so at all. They are merely quitting the ruined hostel to install themselves in a new and more habitable house. They carry with them their debts and their

obligations; they remove to their new abode their instincts, their habits, their ideals, their passions also, their merits and their faults, their acquisitions and their memories. The house is different, but the guests are the same; and the old life will resume its course in the new dwelling and will be perhaps a little nobler, perhaps a little fairer, perhaps filled with a little brighter light.

THE GREAT REVELATION

XVI

THE GREAT REVELATION

I

WE despair of ever knowing the origin of the universe, its aim, its laws, or its intentions; and we end by doubting whether there be any. It were wiser very humbly to confess that we are not able to conceive them. It is probable that, if the universe to-morrow were to yield us the key of its riddle, we should be as incapable of understanding how to use it as is a dog to whom we show the key of a clock. In revealing its great secret to us, it would teach us hardly anything; or at least the revelation would have but an insignificant influence upon our life, our happiness, our ethics, our efforts, and our hopes. It would soar at such heights that no one would perceive it; at most it would disencumber the sky of our

religious illusions, leaving only the infinite void of the ether in their place.

2

For that matter, there is no saying but that we once possessed this revelation. It is highly possible that the religions of nations which have disappeared, such as the Lemurians, the Atlanteans and many others, were aware of it and that we have discovered its remains in the esoteric traditions that have come down to us. It must not indeed be forgotten that there exists, side by side with the outward, scientific history, a secret history of mankind which derives its substance of legends, myths, hieroglyphics, strange monuments and mysterious writings from the hidden meaning of the primitive books. One thing is certain, that, though the imagination of those who interpret this occult history is often venturesome, all that they declare is not to be despised and deserves to be examined more seriously one day than has hitherto been done.

The Great Revelation

The essence of this esoteric revelation is very well summed up by M. Marc Saunier, a disciple of Fabre d'Olivet and Saint-Yves d'Alveydre, in his book, *La Légende des symboles.*

"The Initiates," he says, "have always regarded each continent as a being subject to the same laws as man. For them, the minerals constitute its skeleton, the flora its flesh, the fauna its nerve-cells and the human races the grey matter of its brain. This continent itself is but an organ of the earth, wherein each man is treated as a thinking cell and whereof the thought is represented by the sum of human thoughts. The earth itself is but an organ of the solar system, which in turn is considered as an individual; and our solar system thus becomes merely an organ of another being of the infinite, whose heart would appear in the star Alpha in Aries. And lastly, by a final synthesis, we come to the Cosmos, which expresses the general sum of all things, in a being whose body is the

world and whose thought is the universal intelligence, exalted by the religions to the rank of a deity."

The basis of their doctrine is plainly evolutionistic. Each continent has merely transformed, in its own time and according to its own ideal, the seeds which came from the Hyperborean tracts; and man is but the result of an animal evolution. For the rest, they borrow it in part from the Hindus, thus anticipating by many thousands of years the latest hypotheses of our modern science.

3

But, without loitering in these shifting sands, let us go direct to clear and reliable sources. We possess, in the sacred and secret books of India, of which we know only an infinitesimal part, a cosmogony which no European conception has ever surpassed. It would not be correct to say that it attained, at the first endeavour, the ultimate limits beyond which the mind of

man could not venture without dissolving in the infinite, for it was the work of centuries of which we do not know the tale; but it indisputably preceded all the others, its birth was earlier than anything that we know and, at the beginning of all things, it exceeded in grandeur all that we have learnt and all that we can imagine.

It was the first, for instance, long before our historic periods, to give us a dizzy yet concrete idea of the infinity of time. The Book of Manu teaches us that twelve thousand years of mortals are but a day and a night to the gods; their year, therefore, consisting of three hundred and sixty days, numbers 4,320,000 years. A thousand years of the gods make but one of Brahma's days, that is to say, 4,320,000,000 human years, representing the total life of our globe; and Brahma's night is of equal duration. Three hundred and sixty of these days and nights make one of this god's years; and a hundred of these years constitute one of his lives, that is to say, the duration of the universe, which is rep-

resented by the formidable figue of 311,-090,000,000,000 years. After this he begins a new life. At present we have not yet attained the noon of Brahma's actual day nor half the life-time of our terrestrial globe.

To complete this outline of the stupendous chronology of the Vedas, I continue to profit by some notes received from my war-time godson, who has a thorough knowledge of this unduly neglected science. For the rest, it will be seen that chronology and cosmogony are here in intimate connection:

"The day of Brahma (4,320,000,000 years) is divided into fourteen lives of Manu, consisting alternately of seven Manvantaras and seven Pralayas. The word Manvantara signifies the interval between two Manus: one of these appears in the dawn and the other in the twilight of this period of terrestrial activity. The morning Manu gives the Manvantara its name and the evening Manu presides over

the Pralaya, that is to say, the period of dissolution, or negative *status quo,* death, sleep, or inertia, as the case may be, which divides two waves of life.

"Universal evolution is a chain without beginning or end, each link of which in turn appears and disappears in our field of consciousness. Brahma himself dies only to be reborn. But for the sovereign of the worlds, as for a random star or the least of organized creatures, there is death and dissolution only from the individual point of view. Darkness is the ransom to be paid for light, the evening balances the morning, age is the price of youth and death the reverse of life. In reality, however, all evolution is at the same time continuous and discontinuous; the Manvantaras and Pralayas are at once simultaneous and successive; each individual life is engendered by its elemental double and engenders its residual double. Every decline of life in a given place coincides with an increase of being in a corresponding place and proceeds by means of a rebirth

in a fresh place. Fundamentally, there is no individual life. We are at once ourselves and another, ourselves and several others, ourselves and all others, ourselves and the Universe, ourselves and infinity.

" The evolution of our terrestrial globe is an infinitesimal cycle of this universal evolution, corresponding merely with a day and a night of Brahma, and is divided into fourteen cycles, each consisting of a Manvantara and a Pralaya. The cycle of organic evolution upon our solidified globe represents only one of these subdivisions, that is to say, the radius of the organic sphere is only a fourteenth part of the radius of the mineral sphere. Mineral evolution is manifestly continuous from the formation of the globe to its dissolution. If, between the periods of geological activity, there exists a Pralaya of any kind, this latter, despite the etymology of the word, must be not a dissolution, which would be perfectly inconceivable from the logical and scientific point of view, but a period of inertia or abate-

ment, of which the hypothesis is readily admissible and of which the glacial periods, occurring in the very course of the present Manvantara, afford us an example. In the earlier cycles of Manu, the earth passed in succession through the various stages of condensation which science regards as igneous and which correspond with the ethereal, gaseous and liquid evolution of the elements. During these long periods, the life of the present existed potentially in the soul of the earth and actually on other globes than ours."

4

But we will proceed no further with this outline, which would become so complicated as to be inextricable. Let us remember simply the magnificent doctrine of the reincarnation, which is the most ancient reply, the only decisive and, no doubt, the most plausible reply, to all the problems of justice and injustice, the immortal torture of mortals, and its corollary, the law of Karma, which, as my godson so truly

says, "is the most wonderful of ethical discoveries: it represents abstract liberty and is enough to enfranchise the human will from any superior or even infinite being. We are our own creators and the sole captains of our fate; no other than ourselves rewards or punishes us; there is no sin, but only consequences; there is no morality, but only responsibilities. Now Buddha taught that, merely by virtue of this sovran law, the individual must be reborn to reap what he has sowed; and this certainty of rebirth was enough to neutralize the horror of death."

Is all this nothing more than imagination, than the dreams of brains more ardent than our own, the hallucinations of ascetics which amaze the young and the immobility or the echo of immemorial traditions bequeathed by other races, or by races anterior to man and more spiritual? It is impossible to decide; but, whatever its origin, it is certain that the monument whereof we have seen but a corner of the

pedestal is prodigious and that it has not a human aspect. All that we can say is that our modern sciences, notably archæology, geology and biology, confirm rather than invalidate either of these revelations.

5

But this is not the question for the moment. Let us suppose that one of these revelations, for instance, that of the sacred books of India, were true, incontestable and scientifically proved by our researches; or that an interplanetary communication or a declaration of some superhuman being no longer permitted us to doubt its authenticity: what influence would such a revelation have upon our life? What would it transform in our life, what novel element would it add to our morality or our happiness? No doubt it would work but a very slight change. It would pass too high above us; it would not descend to our level; it would not touch us; we should lose ourselves in its immensity; and upon the whole, knowing everything, we

should be neither happier nor wiser than when we knew nothing.

Not to know what he has come upon this earth to do: that is man's great and everlasting torment. Now we must perforce admit that the actual truth of the universe, if some day we learn it, will probably be very similar to one or other of those revelations which, while appearing to teach us everything, teach us nothing at all. It will at least possess the same inhuman character. It will necessarily be as unlimited in both space and time, as abysmal, as foreign to our senses and our brain. The more tremendous, the more majestic the revelation, the greater chance will it have of being true; but also, the more remote from us it is, the less will it interest us. We can hardly hope to escape from this discouraging dilemma: those revelations, explanations or interpretations which are too petty will not satisfy us, because we shall instinctively feel them to be insufficient; while those which are too great will pass us by too far to affect us.

6

It nevertheless seems desirable that this revelation of the sacred books of India should be authentic and that our knowledge, still so slight, so unimportant, so timid and so incoherent, should gradually confirm, as indeed it unwittingly does daily, certain points scattered through the boundless immensity of this immemorial truth.

It would in any case, even if it did not succeed in affecting us directly, possess the advantage of enlarging our horizon, which is narrower than we suppose, until it embraces infinity; of studding this infinity with magnificent landmarks; of animating it, peopling it, filling it with wonderful faces, making it a living, perceptible, almost comprehensible thing.

We all know that we dwell in infinity; but this infinity is, for us, only a bare and barren word, a black and uninhabitable void, a formless abstraction, a lifeless expression, to which our imagination can give only a momentary vitality, at the cost of a

tiring, solitary, unskilful, unassisted, ungrateful and unfruitful effort. We hold ourselves, in fact, pent in this terrestrial world of ours and in our brief historic ages; and at the most we raise our eyes, from time to time, towards the other planets of our solar system and project our thoughts, which are discouraged from the beginning, as far as the nebulous periods that preceded man's advent on our globe. More and more deliberately we are directing the whole activity of our intelligence upon ourselves; and, by a regrettable optical illusion, the more it restricts its field of action, the deeper we believe it to be probing. Our thinkers and philosophers, fearing lest they should stray as their predecessors did before them, no longer concern themselves with any but the least disputable aspects, problems and secrets; but, if these are the least disputable, they are also the least sublime; and man, in his quality as a terrestrial animal, becomes the sole object of their investigations. The scientists, on the other

hand, are accumulating minor data and observations whose weight is stifling them; yet they no longer dare to thrust them aside or open them out, so as to ventilate them by some general law, some salutary hypothesis, for those which they have hitherto ventured to advance have been pitiably contradicted, one after the other, and scouted by experience.

Nevertheless, they are right to act as they do and to continue their investigations according to their narrow and restricted methods; but we are entitled to observe that, the closer they believe that they have drawn to a fugitive truth, the greater are their uncertainty and confusion, the more precarious, imaginary and insufficient seem the foundations upon which they based their confidence and the more fully do they perceive the immense distance that still divides them from the least of life's secrets. As one of the most illustrious of them, Sir William Grove, prophetically remarked:

"The day is fast approaching when it

will be confessed that the Forces we know are but the phenomenal manifestations of Realities we know nothing about, but which were known to the Ancients and by them worshipped."

7

This, indeed, is what we are bound to think if we study slightly this primitive revelation, this ancient wisdom and what has grown out of it. Man once knew more than he now knows. He was ignorant perhaps of the enormous mass of petty details which we have observed and classified and which have enabled us to subdue certain forces which he never thought of turning to account: but it is probable that he understood better than we do their nature, their essence and their origin.

The higher civilization of humanity, which history traces back tentatively to five or six thousand years before Christ, is perhaps far more ancient; and, without admitting, as has been asserted, that the Egyptians kept astronomical records through a period of six hundred and thirty

thousand years, we may consider it as established that their observations embraced two precessional cycles, two sidereal years, or fifty-one thousand, seven hundred and thirty-six solar years. Now they themselves were not initiators but initiates, who derived all that they knew from a more ancient source. It was the same with the Semites, in the matter of their primitive books and their Kabbalah; and the Greeks, among whom all those who really taught us something about the origin and constitution of the world and its elements, about nature and divinity, mind and matter, men such as Hesiod, Pythagoras, Anaxagoras, Plato and the Neo-Platonists, were likewise initiates, that is to say, they were men who, having travelled in Egypt or India, had drunk of the same one and immemorial spring. Our prehistoric religions, Scandinavian or Germanic and the Druidism of the Celts, those of China and Japan, of Mexico and Peru, despite numerous deformations, were also derived from the same source, even as our great western

metaphysics, which preceded our modern materialism, with its somewhat sordid outlook, and notably the metaphysics of Leibnitz, Kant, Schelling, Fichte and Hegel have approached it and, more or less unconsciously, slaked their thirst at it.

It is therefore certain that through the Greeks, through the Bible, through Christianity, which is its last echo, for the author of the Apocalypse and St. Paul were initiates, we are all steeped in this revelation; that there is not and never has been any other; that it is the great human or superhuman revelation; and that consequently it would be right and salutary to study it more attentively and more profoundly than we have hitherto done.

8

Where does the source of this revelation lie? We place it in the east because nearly everything that we know about it is found in the sacred books of India. But it is almost certainly of western or rather Hyperborean origin and dates back to

those wonderful vanished Atlanteans, whose last Protoscythian colonies flourished over eleven thousand years ago and whose existence can no longer be denied.

Remember that famous passage in Plato:

"One day, when Solon was conversing with the priests of Saïs on the history of the remote ages, one of them said:

"'O Solon, Solon, you Greeks are always children! . . . There is not an opinion, not a tradition of knowledge among you that is old. . . . You know nothing of that noble race of heroes of whom you are a remnant. . . . Nine thousand years, as our annals record, have elapsed since what I am about to tell you. . . . The most famous of your actions was the overthrow of the island of Atlantis, which lay over against the Pillars of Hercules, was greater than Libya and Asia put together and was the passage to other islands and to a great ocean whereof the Mediterranean Sea was but a harbour; and within

the Pillars the empire of Atlantis reached in Europe to Tyrrhenia and in Libya to Egypt. This mighty power was arrayed against Egypt and Greece and all the Mediterranean countries. Then your city did bravely and won renown throughout the earth. For, risking her own existence, she repelled the invader and gave liberty to all the nations within the Pillars. Soon after, earthquakes arose and floods; and your warlike race was swallowed up by the earth; and the island of Atlantis also disappeared in the sea.' "

This page in the *Timæus* is the first glimpse that history properly so-called affords of the immense chaos of the antediluvian period. Modern researches and discoveries have confirmed it step by step. To quote Roisel, who devoted a remarkable book to the Atlanteans, a work less well-known than those of Scott Elliott and Rudolf Steiner, but one that does not admit of the slightest doubt:

" It is proved that, long before the his-

toric ages, the Atlanticans had acquired a marvellous science whose elements mankind is hardly beginning to reconstitute and whose mighty relics are found in ancient Gaul, Egypt, Persia, India and the central portion of the American continent. More than ten thousand years before our era, they knew the precession of the equinoxes, the slow changes which many stars experience in their courses and the thousand secrets of nature. They had processes of which modern industry has not yet fathomed the mysteries."

9

The outcome of these studies is that humanity never underwent a disaster to be compared with the disappearance of Atlantis. It will perhaps need thousands of years to repair that loss and to reascend to the level of a civilization which had certainties of which we laboriously glean the scattered remnants, regarding the origin and movements of the universe, the energy of matter, the unknown forces of this and

other worlds, the life beyond the grave and a social organization and political economy similar to those of the bees. Nothing could better prove the uselessness of man's effort than this unparalleled loss, if we did not strive to hope in spite of all.

A nation of wonderful metallurgists, who had discovered the means of tempering copper for which we are still seeking, a nation of fabulous engineers, whose geometry, as Professor Smyth tells us, began where Euclid's ends, they lifted and transported to enormous distances, by mysterious methods, rocks weighing fifteen hundred tons and strewed the world with those fantastic moving stones known as "mad stones" and "stones of truth," stones weighing five hundred tons and so ingeniously poised on one of their corners that a child can move them with its finger, whereas the united impetus of two hundred men would be incapable of overturning them, stones which, from the geological point of view, never belong to the spot where they are found. A nation of ex-

plorers who had traversed and colonized the whole surface of the earth, a nation of scholars, mathematicians and astronomers, they appear to have been above all things ruthless rationalists and logicians, endowed with, so to speak, a metallic brain, the lateral lobes of which were much more highly developed than ours. They applied their incomparable faculties exclusively to the study of the exact sciences; and the sole object of their energies was the conquest of truth. But the study of the invisible and the infinite, under their powerful scrutiny, itself becomes an exact science; and the main idea of their cosmogony, by virtue of which everything issues from the ocean of cosmic matter or from the boundless waves of the eternal ether, soon to return and to reemerge, disfigured and overladen with numberless myths by the imagination of their degenerate descendants or settlers: this main idea forms the base of every religion. It is improbable that man will ever discover one to equal it or replace it.

10

It is in the sacred books of India that we find the surest and most plentiful traces of this cosmogony or of this revelation. Less than a century ago, men were almost wholly unaware of the existence of these sacred books. Their interpreters have taken two different paths. On the one hand, scholars whom we may describe as official have supplied translations of a certain number of texts, which might also be called official, texts which they do not always understand and which their readers understand even less. On the other hand, initiates, genuine or pretended, with the assistance of adepts of an occult fraternity, have suggested a new and more impressive interpretation of these same texts or of others still more secret. They still, rightly or wrongly, inspire a certain distrust. We are obliged to admit the authenticity and the antiquity of certain traditions, of certain primitive and essential writings, though it is impossible to assign

an approximate date to them, so completely are they merged in the mists of the prehistoric ages. But they are almost incomprehensible without keys and commentaries; and it is here that our doubts and hesitations begin. A large number of those commentaries are likewise very ancient and in their turn need keys; others appear to be more recent; lastly, others seem to be contemporary; and it is often difficult to draw a dividing line between that which may well exist in the original and that which the interpreters believe to exist in the original or which they more or less deliberately add to it. Now the most striking, the most impressive and in any case the most lucid part of the doctrine is often contained in the commentaries.

Next, as I have observed, comes the question of the keys, which is intimately connected with the foregoing. These keys are more or less workable and command more or less respect; sometimes they seem fanciful or arbitrary; they are delivered only with curious precautions, sin-

gly and grudgingly; and they are apt to unlock several superimposed meanings. And all this is accompanied by fantastic reticences, by so-called dangerous or terrible secrets, withheld at the decisive moment, and by revelations which, it is contended, cannot be communicated until many centuries have elapsed. Doors through which we were about to pass are slammed in our faces just as we were at last catching a glimpse of a long-promised horizon; and behind each of them hides a supreme initiate, a still living master, the sacred guardian of the ultimate mysteries, who knows all things, but can or will say nothing.

Observe, moreover, that a host of more or less intelligent *illuminati,* of elderly women and unbalanced spinsters, of simple-minded people who accept, blindly and off-hand, that which they do not understand, of discontented, unsuccessful, vain or crafty persons who fish in troubled waters, in a word, all the usual suspect mob that gathers round any more or less mysterious doctrine, science or phenomenon, has

discredited these first esoteric interpretations, of which the very source is none too clear. Lastly, let us add that the burning of the famous library of Alexandria, in which all the knowledge of the east was amassed, the destruction in the sixteenth century, under the Mogul Akbar, of thousands of Sanskrit volumes, the systematic and merciless demolition, especially during the first few centuries of the Church and in the Middle Ages, of all that referred or alluded to this dreaded and embarrassing revelation, have deprived us of our best means of control. The adepts, it is true, assert on the other hand that the true texts, as well as the ancient commentaries which alone enable them to be understood, still exist in the secret crypts and subterranean libraries of Thibet or the Himalayas, libraries of books more innumerable than any which we possess in the west, and that they will reappear in a more enlightened age. It is possible, but in the meanwhile they are of no help to us.

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II

Be this as it may, what we have is enough to perplex us greatly; and the control allowed by the fragments which have been saved from historic antiquity absolutely removes all suspicion of more or less recent fraud or deception in respect of the essentials. Moreover, any fraud or deception of this nature seems hardly possible and would be so ingenious that we should be obliged to marvel at it as a phenomenon almost as remarkable as that whereof it would be seeking to give the illusion; and we should have to admit that the mind of man has never insinuated itself so far into the infinity of time and space, or into the origin of things, and has never risen to such heights. Had this revelation profited by all the attainments of our latter-day science and thought, it could not have furnished us with theories more satisfactory, more logical, more coherent, more plausible, more synthetic, or worthier of the infinity which they strive to embrace

and often seem to attain, on the rhythm of the eternities, the ebb and flow of the eternal Becoming, the never-ending cycle and the periodic existences of the ego, the birth, movement and evolution of the worlds, the divine breath and the intelligence that animate it, on Maya, the eternal illusion of ignorance, the struggle for life, natural selection, the gradual development and transformation of stars and men, the functions and energies of the ether, immortal and infallible justice, the intermolecular and fantastic activity of matter, on the nature of the soul and the existence of the vast, nameless power that governs the universe, in a word, on all the riddles that assail and all the mysteries that overwhelm us.

But, let us hasten to repeat it, there could not seriously be any question of fraud, because the texts or traditions that might be regarded with suspicion are corroborated by other texts, such as the sacred inscriptions of Egypt, which no one thinks of contesting. At most we may come upon a

few passages antedated by the imprudent zeal of adepts or commentators, a few interpolations which merely embroider the majestic lines. Taking it as a whole, we have to do with a revelation which dates back infinitely farther than all that we have called the prehistoric ages, wherefore it is legitimate that our astonishment should be unbounded.

12

Very good, it will be said, this interpretation of the universe, this anthropocosmogenesis is the loftiest, the most spacious, the most wonderful, the most unassailable that has ever been conceived; it teems in every part with human thought and imagination; but what is it all based upon? When all is said, we have here only magnificent hypotheses, boldly disguised as authoritative, dogmatic and peremptory declarations, but every one incapable of verification. This is the objection which I myself put forward, a little hastily, in one of the early chapters of *Our Eternity*.

It is indeed undeniable that we shall not for some time to come, that perhaps we shall never know the truth about the origin and the end of the universe or any of the other problems which these declarations profess to solve. But it is curious to note that science, despite itself, is daily drawing nearer to one or other of these declarations and that it is unable to set aside or to contradict any of them. There is for example, a certain study of the genesis of the elements, by the well-known chemist, Sir William Crookes, which unconsciously becomes plainly occultist, while the discovery of the radioactivity of matter reproduces precisely the theory of vortices of the initiate Anaxagoras. It is the same, *mutatis mutandis,* with the function attributed to the ether, the latest, indispensable postulate of our scientists. It is the same with the supreme and essential functions of certain minute glands of which modern medicine is only now beginning to rediscover the importance and which probably hold hidden the primordial secrets of life:

the thyroid gland, which directs growth and intelligence; the suprarenal gland, which governs the unconscious muscle that is the heart; and the pineal gland, the most mysterious of all, which brings us into relation with the unknown worlds. It is the same again with astronomy, when the manifest insufficiency of our so-called cosmic laws, notably that of gravitation, propounds a host of questions which only the cosmogony of the east is able to answer. But this would require a long enquiry, which I am not qualified to undertake.

For the rest, nothing obliges us to accept these declarations as dogmas. There is no question here of a religion which imposes upon us its blind faith, its *Credo quia absurdum*. We are quite entitled to regard them as mere hypotheses, as immense, incomparable antediluvian poems, of which the Mosaic Genesis is but a disfigured fragment. But, even as hypotheses or poems, it must be admitted that they are prodigious, that we have nothing better, nothing more probable to set against

them and that, in view of their incontestable antiquity, of their prehistoric origin, they seem really superhuman.

Must we admit, as the occultists contend, that they come to us from beings superior to man, from more spiritual entities, living under unknown conditions, who occupied our earth or the neighbouring planets before our coming; from a Lemuro-Atlantean civilization which, in its megalithic monuments, has left indelible traces in the memory of the peoples and on the face of our earth? It is quite possible; but here again we are free to await the confirmations of Hindu, Egyptian, Chaldean, Assyrian and Persian archæology, which on this point, as on so many others, has not spoken its last word.

13

I am well aware that this revelation, as apparently all those which may be made in the course of time, dates back to and ends in the unknowable, the insoluble mystery of divinity, of being, or existence; and

it necessarily stops short before the barrier of this unknowable, which is as impenetrable and impregnable as a cliff that is infinite in every dimension and formed of a single block of black diamond. There is nothing to be done; we can but halt; we cannot even seek to outflank it, to approach it from the other side, for the other side, if we could reach it, would necessarily be like the side in front of us, seeing that the non-existence of everything would be just as inexplicable, just as incomprehensible as its existence. It is true that, in the secret recesses of the doctrine, the universe and all that it contains is known as Maya, that is to say, the eternal illusion, so that the two irreconcilable mysteries unite in a still greater mystery which man's intelligence can no longer approach.

Fundamentally, the primitive riddle, the primordial mystery not being elucidated, all the rest illumines only the steps that lead from comparative knowledge to absolute ignorance. It will probably be the same with all the revelations that may ad-

dress themselves to man's intelligence so long as he continues on this planet, for this intelligence doubtless has limits which no effort can enlarge. But in the meantime it is certain that these steps, which lead to nothing, nevertheless, at the first onset and from the earliest days led him to the highest point which his intelligence has attained or can hope to attain. The most ancient explanation embraces straightway all the attempts at explanation that have hitherto been offered. It harmonizes the positivism of science with the most transcendental idealism; it accepts matter and spirit; it reconciles the mechanical impulsion of atoms and worlds with their intelligent guidance. It gives us an unconditioned divinity, " a causeless cause of all the causes," worthy of the universe which is this divinity itself and of which all the divinities that have succeeded it in all our religions are but scattered, mutilated and unrecognizable members. It offers us, lastly, in its law of Karma, by virtue of which each being undergoes in

his successive lives the consequences of his actions and gradually purifies himself, the loftiest, justest and most unassailable, the most fertile, consoling and hopeful moral principle that could ever be proposed to man. Because of all this it appears worthy of investigation, respect and admiration.

14

This respect and admiration, however, do not militate against our liberty to choose or reject many things, or to reserve them while we wait for further light. When we are told, for instance, that the Cosmos is guided by an infinite series of hierarchies of sensient beings, each having a mission to fulfil, which are the agents of the Karmic and Cosmic laws; when it is added that each of these beings was a man in an earlier Manvantara, or is preparing to become one in the present or in a future Manvantara, that they are perfected men, or nascent men, and that, in their higher and less material spheres, they do not differ morally from terrestrial human beings

save in that they do not possess the sense of personality and of emotional nature; when, lastly, we are assured that what we call unconscious Nature is in reality a complex of forces manipulated by semi-intelligent beings (Elementals) directed by the High Planetary Spirits (Dhyani-Shohans), whose total forms the Word Manifest of the non-manifest Logos and constitutes at the same time both the intelligence of the universe and its immutable law, we can do homage to the ingenuity of these speculations, as to that of thousands of others which perhaps embrace the truth more closely than our best and most recent scientific hypotheses; we are free to take what we please from them and to leave what we please. All this, I grant, is by no means proved, is not verified, or cannot be verified, save in certain details, whereas the great fundamental outlines will probably always escape the control of our unequipped intelligence. But what we must, I repeat, admire without reserve is the prodigious spiritual edifice offered by

the sum total of this revelation, the immense intellectual effort which, since the dawn of humanity, has attempted to unravel the unfathomable chaos of the origin, structure, progress, direction and end of the universe and which appears to have succeeded to this extent, that hitherto nothing has been found that equals it, or is not inspired by it or, often unconsciously, returns to it.

15

I said in the first part of this essay that too lofty a revelation, even were it incontestable, would have hardly any influence upon our life, that it would change little in it, that it would occur too far from us in the immensity of space and that it would not sink into our hearts and minds. Was it thus with that of which we are now speaking, which is the only truly superhuman and yet acceptable and almost unassailable revelation that we have had? Yes and no, according to the point of view which we take up. All that it contains of too great a character, except its notion of

eternity, has not really modified our ideas, has not permeated into our habits. It has not even profoundly affected the peoples who have handed it down to us and who, abandoning any endeavour to understand it, have transformed it into a barbarous and monstrous anthropomorphic polytheism. It is more or less the same everywhere. All the religions, from the pagan religions of China and Japan, Gaul and ancient Germany, Mexico and Peru, down to Christianity with its variants and its offshoots, have issued from it; but all have not been able to live and govern men, save by disfiguring and mutilating it, by dwarfing it to the lowest stature of the souls of their time, by altering it beyond recognition. It is therefore highly probable that matters would be the same with any other and greater revelation, if such were possible, even though this had all the signs of a divine, direct, authentic, indubitable, irrefutable, irrecusable revelation, in a word, with that which we are still awaiting without daring to hope for it.

THE NECESSARY SILENCE

XVII

THE NECESSARY SILENCE

I

THE practitioners of occult science in the east tell us of certain dwellers in the solitudes of Thibet and the Himalayas, Initiates, Masters, heirs to the wisdom of the "Sons of Light," or the "Seven Primordials," who possess the seven keys which enable them to understand the sacred prehistoric texts. They are said to be the silent depositories of the secret of the intermolecular or interetheric forces, by the aid of which the races of beings who preceded man upon this earth used to transport to enormous distances monoliths of more than five hundred tons' weight, which have no relation to the stones that surround them and whose arrangement and astronomical orientation manifestly reveal the intervention of an

intelligent and even a highly scientific mind.

These monoliths are sometimes carved, as for instance the famous colossal idols in the valley of Bamian, in Afghanistan, of which one is 173 feet high, or the five hundred and fifty monsters of Easter Island, in Polynesia, which, we may observe in passing, remain one of the most insoluble and perplexing riddles in the world. Hewn out of basalt, reclining or standing erect upon their platforms, these sculptures, one of which measures over 90 feet in height, are undoubtedly the most ancient human effigies to be found upon our earth. Official science ascribes to them an antediluvian origin, while esoteric tradition regards them as portraits of the giants of the last Atlantean race, which became degenerate and lapsed into witchcraft shortly before the disappearance of the mysterious continent whereof Easter Island is supposed to be merely one of the loftier summits to-day emerging from the lonely Pacific.

I have before me as I write the photo-

graphs of some of these haunting giants; and I do not believe that in our most oppressive nightmares it would be possible to imagine faces more formidable, more impassive and unfeeling, more eternally ferocious, more coldly supercilious, more pitilessly disdainful and icily omnipotent. Are they Selenites or Martians, with their tightly-closed, implacable mouths and those eyes of theirs, hollow, like wells of malediction, or protuberant and framed in an airman's goggles? They are not in any way simian, as one might have supposed, but rather represent demoniacal and abstract entities, such as evil, doom and fatality. They seem not so much inhuman as prehuman or posthuman; and they bear a horrible relation to certain ancestral memories which slumber in the marrow of our bones, warning us that such faces undoubtedly once existed.

2

But let us return to our great Initiates. They are, it appears, reputed to be the

guardians of the irresistible and incommensurable sidereal force, the force which supports and directs the worlds and which is capable, if it were misused, of destroying in a moment the whole human species, all that lives upon the earth and this very earth itself; but it is also capable, if it were wisely tamed, of ensuring man an ultimate royalty, perhaps access to other heavenly bodies and, in any case, a power so great that the Golden Age which existed of old, thanks to the subjection of this force, might flourish once more upon our planet.

All this is possible; and, for the moment, we need not go into the matter. But that, possessing the secret of this force and of many others, transmitted from Hierophant to Candidate, or, as they say "from mouth to ear," the experts in occult science do not divulge it and place it at the service of humanity: this is the great reproach brought against them; and for all those who are not aware that the end of Initiation is not power and material happiness but wisdom, development and the up-

lifting of the inner being it is the best proof that they are cheats and impostors. It may be that, driven into a corner, they are silent because they have nothing to tell us; but the argument is not so unanswerable as those who avail themselves of it are inclined to think. We shall perhaps see this before long. It is indeed not impossible that one day some accident of knowledge will place one or other of our scientists in a position analogous to that of these Masters or Initiates. To him also the terrible question of the necessary silence will then present itself. We have but lately witnessed in this war the insensate and demoniacal use which man has made of certain inventions. What will happen if other energies are placed in his hands, energies far more formidable, which we seem to be on the point of discovering and releasing?

Man is not ready to know more of such matters than he now knows. The safety of the species is at stake. Humanity, which is hardly emerging from its infancy,

or has only just attained the dangerous period of adolescence (it would be about sixteen or seventeen years of age, according to Dr. Jaworski's well-supported and striking historic parallel), has already passed the limit of the inventions which it is able to assimilate or endure without incurring the risk of death. Almost all of them, from the subjection of steam and the still dubious taming of electricity, have done it incomparably more harm than good. Explosives, for example, which have helped it to build a few roads — a work which the Romans, for that matter, did quite as well as we do — to open up a few mines, to pierce a few tunnels, have cost it millions of young lives.

Perhaps it is time, not to check the investigations of science, but to control its discoveries and to reserve, as the occultists wisely did, for a select circle of Initiates, rigorously tested and bound by inviolable oaths, the secret of those too perilous energies around which we are feeling our way and which are on the point of revealing

themselves and becoming public property. Our moral evolution is several centuries behind our scientific evolution; and it is more than probable that the latter, being too swift and too intensive, may disastrously impede the former. It will profit no one to travel in three hours from Paris to Pekin, from Pekin to New York and from New York to Calcutta, if these repeated and miraculous journeys leave those who take them in the same frame of mind on their arrival as on their departure. We are more or less in the same position as Russia, whose heart and spirit were not steadfast enough, not resolute enough, to bear what the head had too quickly and too artificially stored up. Nothing is more quickly disseminated or more readily assimilated than the results of science; nothing, on the other hand, is more slow, more painful or more precarious than moral evolution; and yet it is upon this alone, as we are realizing more and more clearly, that man's happiness and future depend.

KARMA

XVIII

KARMA

I

STRIPPED of its innumerable and inextricable oriental complications, which may possibly correspond with realities but which cannot be verified, Karma, the infallible Law of Retribution, is, when all is said, what we, speaking more vaguely and without believing in it unduly, call Immanent Justice. Our Immanent Justice is a somewhat idle shadow. True, it often manifests itself after monstrous actions, great vices, sins or iniquities; but we rarely have the opportunity of seeing it intervene in the thousand petty acts of injustice, cruelty, weakness, dishonesty and baseness of ordinary life, though the aggregate of these paltry but incessant misdeeds may weigh heavier than the most notorious crime. In any case, its action

being more dispersed, more diffuse, slower and more often moral than material, nearly always escapes our observation; and, as, on the other hand, it appears to cease at the moment of death, it hardly ever has time to demand its due and usually arrives too late at the bedside of a sick or dying man, who has lost consciousness or no longer has the time to expiate his offences.

Karma then, if you will, is Immanent Justice; only, it is no longer an inconstant goddess, inconsistent, incoherent, impotent, erratic, capricious, inexact, forgetful, timid, inattentive, sluggish, evasive, intangible and bounded by the tomb, but a god, vast and inevitable as Destiny, a god who fills up each outlet, each horizon, each crevice of every existence and who is omnipresent, omniscient, omnipotent, infallible, impassible and incorruptible. He is in us, as we are in him. He is ourselves. He is more than we: he is what we are, while he is still what we were and is already what we shall become. We are small, evanescent and ephemeral; he is great, imper-

turbable, immovable, eternal. Nothing escapes him of that which escapes us and no doubt will escape us even beyond the tomb. Not an action, not a wish, not a thought, not the shadow of an intention but is weighed more strictly than it was weighed by the forty-two posthumous judges who awaited the soul on that further shore of which we are told in one of the most ancient texts in the world, the Egyptian *Book of the Dead*. All is set down, dated, valued, verified, classified, entered as debit or credit, as reward or expiation, in the immense and eternal index of the astral records. There can be nothing that he does not know, because he has taken part in all that he judges; and he judges us not from the depth of our present ignorance, but from the height of all that we shall learn much later. He is not only our intelligence and our consciousness of to-day, which are hardly waking and no longer count their errors; he is even now, for they already dwell within us, though they be inactive, impotent, dumb

and blind, our intelligence and our consciousness to come, when they shall have attained, in the course of the ages and of the innumerable developments, expiations and ascents, the loftiest summits of Wisdom and Discernment.

At the hour of our death the account seems closed; but he is simply asleep and will resume his hold of us again. He will slumber perhaps for hundreds, nay, thousands of years in " Devachan," that is to say, in the state of unconsciousness which prepares us for a new incarnation; but, when we awake, we shall find the assets and liabilities added up beyond recall; and our Karma will merely continue the life which we have laid aside. It will continue to be ourselves in that life and to see the consequences of our faults and our deserts burst into flower and afterwards to see other causes bear fruit in other effects, until the consummation of the ages when every thought born upon this earth ends by losing sight of it.

Karma

2

Karma, as we see, is, when all is said, the immortal entity which man fashions by his deeds and thoughts and which follows him, or rather envelops and absorbs him, through his successive lives and changes, even as he incessantly changes, while preserving every previous impress. Man's thoughts, as this doctrine very truly says, build up his character; his deeds make his environment. What man has thought, that he has become; his qualities and natural gifts adhere to him as the results of his ideas. He is, in all truth, created by himself. He is in the fullest sense of the word responsible for all that he is. He is contained in the net of all that he has done. He can neither undo nor destroy the past; but, so long as the effects of the past are yet to come, it is possible for him to alter them or to divert them by fresh exertions. Nothing can affect him that he has not set in movement; no evil can befall him that he has not deserved. In the

infinite evolution of the eternities he will never find himself in the presence of any judge other than himself.

3

It is certain that the idea of this supreme judge, who is our consciousness uninterrupted throughout the centuries and the millenaries, who is each one of us grown more and more enlightened, more and more incorruptible and infallible, leads to the highest, sincerest and purest system of morals that it is possible to conceive or to justify here below. The judge and the defendant are no longer face to face; they are one within the other and form but one and the same person. They can hide nothing from each other; and both have the same urgent interest in discovering the least fault, the slightest shadow and in purifying themselves as quickly and as completely as possible, in order to put an end to the reincarnations and to live at last in the One Being. The best, the saintliest are near doing so from the moment when

they quit this life; but, detached from all things, they do not cease to act for the good of all men, for already they know all things. They go farther than the mystic Christian who expects a reward from without: they are their own reward. They go farther than Marcus Aurelius, the great type of the man without illusions, who continues to act without hoping that his action can profit others: they know that nothing is useless, that nothing can be wasted; it is when they no longer need anything whatever that they work with the greatest ardour.

Contrary to what is too generally believed, this system of morals which leads to absolute repose extols activity. Hear, in this connection, the great teachings of the *Bhagavad-Gita,* the Lord's Song, which is perhaps, as its translators, not without good reason, think, the most beautiful, that is to say, the most exalted book known up to the present time:

"Thy business is with the action only,

never with its fruits; so let not the fruit of action be thy motive. . . . Perform action . . . dwelling in union with the divine, renouncing attachments and balanced evenly in success and failure. . . . Pitiable are they who work for fruit. . . . Man winneth not freedom from action by abstaining from activity, nor by mere renunciation doth he rise to perfection. . . . Perform thou right action, for action is superior to inaction; and, inactive, even the maintenance of thy body would not be possible. The world is bound by action, unless performed for the sake of sacrifice. . . .

"He who seeth inaction in action and action in inaction, he is wise among men, he is harmonious, even while performing all action. Whose works are all free from the moulding of desire, whose actions are burned up by the fire of wisdom, him the wise have called a sage. Having abandoned attachment to the fruit of action, always content, nowhere seeking refuge, he is not doing anything, although doing act-

ions. . . . He should be known as a perpetual ascetic, who neither hateth nor desireth; free from the pairs of opposites . . . he is easily set free from bondage. . . ."

And remember that this, which forms part of the *Mahabharata,* the greatest epic on earth, was written four or five thousand years ago.

4

Whatever we may think of the plausibility of the doctrine or revelation, we cannot dispute that this morality and this justification of justice are the most ancient and at the same time the most beautiful and reassuring that the mind of man has imagined. But they are based upon a postulate which we are perhaps too much inclined to refuse blindly. It asks us in fact to admit that our existence does not end at the hour of our death and that the spirit, or the vital spark, which does not perish, seeks an asylum and reappears in other bodies. At first the postulate seems

monstrous and unacceptable; but on closer examination its aspect becomes much less strange, less arbitrary and less unreasonable. It is, to begin with, certain that, if all things undergo transformation, nothing perishes or is annihilated in a universe which knows no nothingness and in which nothingness alone remains absolutely inconceivable. What we call nothingness could therefore be only another mode of existence, of persistence and of life; and, if we cannot admit that the body, which is only matter, is annihilated in its substance, it is no less difficult to admit that, if it were animated by a spirit — which it is hardly possible to dispute — this spirit should disappear without leaving a trace of any kind.

So the first point of the postulate and the most important is of necessity granted. There remains the second point, that of the successive reincarnations. Here, it is true, we have only hypotheses and probabilities. It is necessary that this spirit, this soul, this vital spark or principle, this idea, this immaterial substance — it matters little

what name we give it — must go or reside somewhere, must do or become something. It may wander in the infinity of space and time, dissolve, lose itself and disappear, or at least mingle and become confused with what it encounters there, and finally become absorbed in that boundless spiritual or vital energy which appears to animate the universe. But, of all hypotheses, the least probable is not that which tells us that, on leaving a body which has become uninhabitable, instead of escaping and wandering through the illimitable vast that fills it with terror, it looks about it for a lodging resembling that which it has lately quitted. Obviously this is only an hypothesis; but in our complete and terrible ignorance it presents itself before any other. We have nothing to support it save the most ancient tradition of humanity, a tradition perhaps prehuman and in any case absolutely general; and experience tends to show that at the base of these traditions and these instances of universal assent there is nearly always a great truth and

that they must be accorded a greater importance and a greater value than have hitherto been attributed to them.

5

As regards evidence, or rather premonitory suggestions of evidence, we have scarcely anything beyond the experiments of Colonel de Rochas, who, by means of hypnotic passes, succeeded in making a few exceptional mediums retrace not only the whole course of their present lives, back to their earliest childhood, but also that of a certain number of previous existences. It cannot be denied that these extremely serious experiments, which were very scientifically conducted, are most bewildering; but the danger of unconscious suggestion or telepathy is not and doubtless will never be sufficiently remote to allow them to become really conclusive.

We find further, on pursuing the same train of ideas, certain cases of reincarnation, like that of one of Dr. Samson's little daughters, as related in the *Annales des*

sciences psychiques for July, 1913. This case, which is almost undisputed, is exceedingly curious; but, though it is not unique, those which resemble it are too rare to allow us to rely upon them.

There remains what are known as prenatal reminiscences. It happens fairly often that a man who finds himself in an unfamiliar country, in a city, a palace, a church, a house, or a garden, which he is visiting for the first time, is conscious of a strange and very definite impression that he "has seen it before." It suddenly seems to him that this landscape, these vaulted ceilings, these rooms and the very furniture and pictures which he finds in them are quite well-known to him and that he recollects every nook and corner and every detail. Which of us but has, at least once in his life, vaguely experienced some such impression? But the recollections are often so definite that the person in whom they occur is able to act as a guide through the house or park which he has never explored and to describe beforehand

what his party will find in this or that room or at the turn of this or that avenue. Is it really a recollection of previous existences, a telepathic phenomenon or an ancestral and hereditary memory? The same question suggests itself touching certain innate aptitudes or faculties, by virtue of which we see children of genius, musicians, painters, mathematicians or simple artisans, who know from the outset, without learning them, nearly all the secrets of their art or craft. Who will venture to decide?

This is about all that we can cite in favour of the doctrine of reincarnation. It is not enough to weigh down the scales. But all the other suppositions, theories or religions, excepting spiritualism, which for the rest is perfectly consistent with successive existences, have less solid foundations and are even, to be truthful, devoid of any. It would therefore be ungracious on their part to reproach the supposition which we are considering with the instability of the arguments whereon it is based.

Once again, how desirable it would be that all this were true! There would be no more moral uncertainties, no more uneasiness in respect of justice. And it is so beautiful, so complete, that it is perhaps real. It is difficult indeed to admit that such a dream is untrue from first to last, a dream which has been dreamed so long, since the beginning of the world, by so many thousands of millions of men and which, despite numerous and far-reaching distortions, has, when all is said, been the one dream of humanity. It is not possible to prove that it is based upon truth; but, unlike most of the religions derived from it, it is not possible either to demonstrate that it is imaginary and fabricated throughout; and, there being this doubt, why should not reason, which it never offends, be allowed to accept it and at heart to hope and act as though it were true, while waiting for science to confirm it completely, or to invalidate it, or to give us another hypothesis which it will perhaps never be able to elaborate?

What at first repels many of those who investigate it is the unduly assured and arbitrary insistence upon a thousand petty details, probably interpolated, as in all religions, by inferior minds, animated by a narrow and maladroit zeal. But these details, viewed from a certain elevation, do not in any way alter the great outlines, which remain immeasurable, admirable and unspoiled.

6

For the rest, whether reincarnation be accepted or rejected, there is surely such a thing as survival, since death and nothingness cannot be conceived; and the whole matter is once more reduced to the problem of continued identity. Even in reincarnation this identity, from our present, limited point of view, would possess only a relative interest, seeing that, all memory of previous existences being abolished, it would necessarily evade us. Let us ask ourselves, moreover, whether this question of personality without solution of

continuity does really possess the importance which we attach to it and whether this importance is not a delusion, a temporary blindness of our egoism, of our terrestrial intelligence. For the fact remains that we interrupt it and lose it every night without disquieting ourselves. It is enough for us to be certain that we shall recover it on awaking; and we are reassured. But suppose that this were not the case and that one evening we were warned that we should not recover it, that on the following morning we should have forgotten all our past existence and should begin a new life, without any memory to connect us with the old. Should we feel the same terror, the same despair, as if we had been told that we should never wake again and that we should be hurled into our death? I do not believe it, I even think that we should accept our lot fairly cheerfully. It would not greatly matter to us that we should have to lose the memory of a past, consisting, like the past of all of us, of more evil than good, provided that life con-

tinued. It would no longer be our life, it would no longer have anything in common with the life of the day before; nevertheless we should not believe that we were losing it and we should retain a vague hope of recovering or recognizing something of ourselves in the existence before us. We should take pains to prepare for this existence, to insure it against misfortune and distress, to make it, in advance, as pleasant and as happy as possible. It might and ought to be so, not only if we believe in reincarnation, because the case would be almost identical, but also if we do not believe in it, since a survival of some sort is almost certain and absolute annihilation is actually inconceivable.

7

Perhaps with a little courage and goodwill it would be possible for us, even in this life, to look higher and farther, to shed for an instant that narrow and dismal egoism which refers all things to self, to tell ourselves that the intelligence or the

good which our thoughts and efforts diffuse in the spiritual spheres are not wholly lost, even when it is not certain that the little nucleus of trivial habits and commonplace recollections that we are possesses them exclusively. If the good actions which we have performed, the noble or merely honest intentions or thoughts which we have experienced attach themselves and give value to a life in which we shall not recognize our own, this is not a sufficient reason to regard them as useless or to deny them all merit. It is well to remind ourselves at times that we are nothing if we are not everything and to learn from now onwards to interest ourselves in something that is not solely ourselves and already to live the ampler, less personal, less egotistical life which presently, without any doubt, whatever may be our creed, will be our eternal life, the only life that matters and the only life for which it is wise to prepare ourselves.

8

If we do not accept reincarnation, Karma none the less exists: a mutilated Karma, it is true; a diminished Karma, devoid of spaciousness, with an horizon limited by death, beginning its work and doing its best in the brief spell of time which it has before it, but less negligible, less impotent, less inactive and ineffective than is supposed. Acting within its narrow sphere, it gives us a fairly accurate albeit very incomplete idea of what it would accomplish in the wider sphere which we deny it. But this would lead us back to the highly debatable question of mundane justice. It is almost insoluble, because its decisive operations, being inward and secret, escape observation. Following many others, who, for the rest, have explained it better than I, I have spoken of it elsewhere, particularly in *Wisdom and Destiny* and in *The Mystery of Justice;*[1]

[1] The first essay in *The Buried Temple.*—A. T. de M.

but, as Queen Scheherazade might say, it would serve no useful purpose to repeat it.

9

Let us then return to Karma properly so-called, the ideal Karma. It rewards goodness and punishes evil in the infinite sequence of our lives. But first of all, some will ask, what is this goodness, what is this evil, what is the best or the worst of our petty thoughts, our petty intentions, our petty ephemeral actions, compared with the boundless immensity of time and space? Is there not an absurd disproportion between the hugeness of the reward or punishment and the pettiness of the fault or merit? Why mix the worlds, the eternities and the gods with things which, however monstrous or admirable at first, are not slow, even within the trivial limits of our life, to lose gradually all the importance which we ascribed to them, to vanish, to fade into oblivion? That is true; but we must needs speak of human things in terms of human beings and on the human

scale. What we call good or evil is that which works us good or evil, that which benefits or harms ourselves or others; and, so long as we live upon this earth and have not disappeared, we must needs attach to good and evil an importance which in themselves they do not possess. The noblest religions, the proudest metaphysical speculations, so soon as they involve human morality, human evolution and the human future, have always been obliged to reduce themselves to human proportions, to become anthropomorphous. This is an invincible necessity, by virtue of which, despite the horizons that tempt us on every hand, it behoves us to limit our ideas and our outlook.

10

Let us then limit them and once more ask ourselves, this time remaining within our sphere, what, after all, is this evil which Karma punishes? If we go to the very root of the matter, evil always arises from a lack of intelligence, from an erroneous and incomplete judgment, ob-

scured or restricted by our egoism, which allows us to perceive only the proximate or immediate advantages of an action harmful to ourselves or others, while concealing the remote but inevitable consequences which such an action always ends by begetting. The whole science of ethics, after all, is based only upon intelligence; and what we call heart, sentiments, character is in fact nothing but accumulated and crystallized intelligence, inherited or acquired, which has become more or less unconscious and is transformed into habits or instincts. The evil which we do we do only because of a mistaken egoism, which sees the limits of its being too near at hand. As soon as intelligence raises the point of view of this egoism, the limits extend, widen and end by disappearing. The terrible and insatiable ego loses its centre of attraction and avidity and knows itself, finds itself and loves itself in all things. Let us not believe blindly in the intelligence of the wicked who succeed, or in the happiness of the criminal. We ought rather to

see the converse, that is to say, the often hideous reality of the success; moreover, this intelligence, in the shape of skill, cunning or disloyalty, is a specialized intelligence, confined within a narrow circuit and, like a constricted jet of water, very effective when directed at a single point; but it is not a true and general, spacious and generous intelligence. Wherever the latter reveals itself, we necessarily find honesty, justice, forbearance, love and kindness, because there is a lofty and full horizon and because there is an instinctive or conscious knowledge of human proportions, of the eternity of existence and the brevity of life, of man's position in the universe, of the mysteries that compass him about and the secret bonds that unite him to all things that we see as well as to all things that we do not see upon earth and in the heavens.

II

Is Karma, then, supposed to punish lack of intelligence? And, in the first place, why not? It is the only real evil upon this

earth; and, if all men were superlatively intelligent, none would be unhappy. But where would the justice of it be? We possess the intelligence which nature has bestowed upon us; it is she, not we, that should be held responsible. Let us understand one another. Karma does not inflict punishment, properly speaking; it simply places us, after our successive existences and slumbers, on the plane on which our intelligence left us, surrounded by our actions and our thoughts. It keeps a check and a record. It takes us such as we have made ourselves and gives us the opportunity to make ourselves anew, to acquire what we lack and to raise ourselves to the level of the highest. We are bound to raise ourselves, but the slowness or rapidity of our ascent depends only upon ourselves. When all is said, the apparent injustice which grants more intelligence to some than to others is but a question of date, a law of growth, of evolution, which is the fundamental law of all the lives that we know, from the infusoria to the stars.

We could at most complain of coming later than the rest; but the rest, in their turn, might with more reason complain of being called too soon, of being unable to profit at once by all that has been acquired since their birth. To avoid recrimination, therefore, we should all have been on the same plane from the outset; we should all have been born at the same time. But then the world would have been complete, perfect, immutable, immobile, from the first moment of its existence and ours. This would perhaps have been preferable; but it is not so and it is, no doubt, impossible that it should be so; in any case, no system of metaphysics, no religion, not even the first, the greatest, the loftiest, the mother of all the rest, ever thought of rejecting the indisputable and indubitable law of endless movement, of the eternal Becoming; and it must be admitted that everything appears to justify it. It is probable that there would be nothing if it were otherwise and that there can only be something on condition that it becomes bet-

ter or worse, that it rises or falls, that it constitutes itself in order to deconstitute and reconstitute itself and that movement is more essential than being or substance. It is so because it is so. There is nothing to be done, nothing to be said; we can but state the fact. We are in a world in which matter would perish and disappear sooner than movement, or rather in which matter, time, space, duration, existence and movement are but one and the same thing.

12

But we also live in a world in which our reason encounters only the impossible, the insoluble and the incomprehensible. The supreme interpretations do no more than shift the riddle, to permit us to obtain glimpses from a higher standpoint of the boundless immensity in which we are striving. Therefore, apart from the puerile explanations which, after successive changes of form, all the religions have drawn from the original religion, three hypotheses and no more offer themselves for

our choice: on the one hand, nothingness, inertia and absolute death, which are inconceivable; on the other hand, chance and its eternal renewals, which are without change, hope, object or end, or which, if they led to anything, would lead either to an inconceivable annihilation or to the third hypothesis, according to which the best becomes infinite, even to total absorption in the imperfectible, the immutable, the immovable, which, as I have said elsewhere,[1] must have occurred already in the eternity that precedes us, since there is no reason why that which could not take place in this eternity should take place in the eternity to come, which is no more infinite, is no more extensive and offers no more chances than the past eternity and which is not of a different nature.

The mother religion itself, the only one which is still acceptable, which takes account of everything and which has foreseen everything, does not escape this last dilemma by extending to thousands of mil-

[1] In *Our Eternity*.— A. T. de M.

lions of years the duration of a year of Brahma, that is to say, the period of evolution, of expiration, of externalization and activity, and to an equal number of thousands of millions of years the duration of a night of this god, that is to say, the period of involution, of inspiration, of internalization, of slumber or inertia, during which all is reabsorbed into the divinity or the sole absolute. It does not escape it either by next multiplying these days and nights by a hundred years which form one life and this life by a hundred lives which lead to figures that defy expression, after which another universe begins.

Here, too, there would be either an eternal recommencement without hope or object, or, if there be progression, final perfection and immobility which ought already to be attained. Let each draw from all this such conclusions as he please or can, or bow once more, in silence, before the Unknowable.

THE END

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